



Morality and politics: Comparing alternate theories



Andrew Miles^{a,*}, Stephen Vaisey^b

^a University of Toronto, Canada

^b Duke University, United States

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ABSTRACT

Debates about the American “culture wars” have led scholars to develop several theories relating morality to political attitudes and behaviors. However, researchers have not adequately compared these theories, nor have they examined the overall contribution of morality to explaining political variation. This study uses nationally representative data to compare the utility of 19 moral constructs from four research traditions – associated with the work of Hunter, Lakoff, Haidt, and Schwartz – for predicting political orientation (liberalism/conservatism). Results indicate that morality explains a third of the variation in political orientation – more than basic demographic and religious predictors – but that no one theory provides a fully adequate explanation of this phenomenon. Instead, political orientation is best predicted by selected moral constructs that are unique to each of the four traditions, and by two moral constructs that crosscut them. Future work should investigate how these moral constructs can be synthesized to create a more comprehensive theory of morality and politics.

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1. Introduction

Not long ago James Davison Hunter, originator of the famous “culture war” hypothesis, posed a series of crucial questions for scholars interested in political behavior. Primary among these was the basic query: does a culture war even exist? Scholars have responded in the affirmative and the negative, but their answers depend more on the definition of a culture war than on debates about political trends in the United States. Indeed, both Hunter and his opponent Alan Wolfe have agreed that the strong divisions of political opinion are largely the province of elites, and that most Americans are far more moderate in their views (c.f. DiMaggio et al., 1996; Fiorina et al., 2006; Hunter, 2006; Wolfe, 2006).

Debates about “culture wars,” however, are fundamentally arguments about the sources of variation in political positions – albeit clothed in more vivid language – and these have existed for years. Even without a “war” at the popular level, differences in political opinions and actions abound. People vote for one candidate or another, support some causes but not others, and consider themselves more or less liberal or conservative. Failures to find a society-wide cultural divide highlight the complexity of the problem, and warn us away from a simple bipolar solution. Yet social scientists continue to care deeply about political heterogeneity, not least because it intersects with important social issues such as stratification, race, and immigration. Scholars therefore continue to search for the unifying logic behind political cleavages. To quote Hunter, we are still groping to understand “the nature and meaning of the differences involved” (Hunter, 2006, 11).

* Corresponding author at: William G. Davis Building, Room DV-3217, University of Toronto Mississauga, 3359 Mississauga Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5L 1C6, Canada.

Researchers have attributed variation in political outcomes to class, demographic characteristics, interpersonal processes, cultural change, community context, and experiences during adolescence, to name a few (Baldassarri and Bearman, 2007; Davis and Robinson, 1996; Hunter, 2006; Mathias, 2013; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Weeden and Grusky, 2012; Wright and Boudet, 2012). Though these efforts have been informative, they have not addressed Hunter's fundamental claim, which was that *moral* differences translate into political diversity. Scholars have explored the question of *whether* the United States is embroiled in a culture war – thus interrogating Hunter's conclusion – but have not fully investigated the theoretical assertion that undergirds it. Does the absence of a culture war at the popular level mean that moral differences play little role in explaining political variation? Or does morality still matter for politics, though perhaps not in the way originally proposed by the culture wars thesis?

Several theories suggest that morality does matter, but scholars do not agree on *which* moral differences matter most. Four prominent theories deriving from sociology, linguistics, and psychology give different answers. Hunter points to relativism and religion, Lakoff to primordial family metaphors, moral foundations theorists to notions of authority and purity, and value theorists to differing value commitments (Baker and Boudens, 2009; Graham et al., 2009; Hunter, 1991; Koleva et al., 2012; Lakoff, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2010). Each approach has prompted research, and each has empirical evidence to support its assertions. However, scholars often investigate their own claims without comparing them to other, equally plausible hypotheses. There are exceptions, but such studies typically consider only two theories at a time, fail to empirically investigate the possibility that the theories are actually tapping the same underlying moral constructs, and are limited by the use of convenience samples (e.g., Van Leeuwen and Park, 2009; McAdams et al., 2008). Even so, these studies suggest that using moral constructs from several theories might better capture political variation.

This paper advances the study of morality and politics by directly addressing these challenges. Using measures representing four influential theories from new, nationally-representative data, it investigates the links between morality and political outcomes to determine (a) if morality significantly and substantively predicts political variation, net of demographic controls, and if so (b) which moral constructs play the most important roles.

2. Does morality matter for politics?

Scholars and political elites have latched onto moral concerns as if they are key to political decisions, but does the evidence support this characterization? Research to date provides a mixed picture. On the one hand most scholars agree that only 10–15% of the American population occupy “opposing moral and ideological universes” (Hunter, 2006, 25), suggesting that moral concerns might play little role in political decision making for the general citizenship. On the other hand, emerging evidence indicates that morality is deeply implicated in political behavior for non-elites as well – one recent study found that moral orientations typically explained more variance in political attitudes than age, gender, religious attendance, or interest in politics (Koleva et al., 2012). Clearly we need further consideration of this question.

Several scholars have offered theoretical tools that can help us link morality to politics. Writing a decade ago, Hechter (2004) argued that class politics in the United States are increasingly being replaced by politics based on cultural divisions. Rather than uniting with others of similar economic standing, Americans are forming ties based on “ethnicity, religion, nationalism, gender, and sexual orientation” (404). These groups form boundaries along non-monetary lines, allowing group-specific experiences and cultures to play more of a role. Often, group cultures contain strong normative elements that take on a moral tone – ethnicity can be bound up with the cultural expectations and sanctions of a home country, for instance, while belonging to a religious community often requires allegiance to a particular moral code. Thus culture-based politics leads naturally to the introduction of moral concerns into the political landscape.

Furthermore, a number of scholars have proposed that humans are fundamentally moral beings. Smith (2003) argued that humans are motivated both by internalized moral commitments and to maintain the moral orders that define their external social environments. Hitlin (2003, 2008) offered a similar argument, and provided evidence that values – defined as conceptions of the desirable – are important components of personal identities. Finally, Haidt and Joseph (2004) argued that evolutionary processes have endowed humans with innate impulses towards goals that most consider to be moral, such as fairness and caring for others (c.f., Greene, 2013, chapter 2). If people are fundamentally morally-attuned, as these scholars suggest, then it seems that morality does – even must – play an important part in shaping their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors both politically and in general. Indeed, substantial work suggests that morality is deeply implicated in many aspects of people's lives, including their cultural orientations (Bellah et al., 1996 [1985]), evaluations and judgments of others (Inbar et al., 2012a; Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Lamont, 1992, 2012), emotions (Greene, 2013, chapter 4; Malti and Latzko, 2012), experiences of solidarity (Vaisey, 2007), and behaviors (Stets and Carter, 2012; Vaisey, 2009; Wikström, 2010). The extent of moral influence on political outcomes, however, remains unclear.

3. Using morality to explain political differences

Given the theoretical plausibility of moral/political linkages and the limited evidence that supports them, we turn now to an exploration of which facets of morality are likely to matter. Below we examine four theories that have explicitly forged moral/political links. These approaches derive from foundational work by Hunter, Lakoff, Haidt, and Schwartz.

3.1. Theories of morality and politics

Hunter's Culture Wars (1991) is perhaps the best known of the theories that links political differences to moral concerns. According to *Hunter* (1991, 2006), differences in political orientation are rooted in differing views of moral authority. On one hand are the traditionalists who see ultimate reality as tied to a transcendent authority that provides fixed standards for social life. Traditionalists endorse moral absolutism, or the notion that what is right and wrong is universally applicable and therefore neither varies from person to person, nor depends on context.¹ Opposite them are progressivists, those who regard human experience as the ultimate reality, and hence expect society to adapt as humankind learns, grows, or otherwise changes. In contrast to traditionalists, progressivists tend to reject moral absolutism in favor of moral relativism. These differing visions of moral authority translate to differing political orientations, with traditionalist looking to the past for solutions to current problems, while progressivists view the past as more malleable, as a source of both fruitful ideas and warnings for the future. Not surprisingly, traditionalists tend to congregate on the right side of the political spectrum, while progressivists are more apt to gather on the left.

George Lakoff takes a different view in his *Moral Politics* (Lakoff, 2002). He argues that people metaphorically view the nation as a family, and hence differences in politics are largely attributable to differences in beliefs about family life, and the moral worldviews they produce. On one side are those endorsing a “strict father” morality, which prizes self-discipline, responsibility, and self-reliance and sees punishment as the primary mechanism for enforcing moral order. On the other side are those who believe in a “nurturant parent” morality that promotes empathy, self-fulfillment, and active concern for others. Lakoff argues that major differences between political conservatives and liberals are rooted in these moral metaphors, with conservatives supporting a legal system based on strict father morality while liberals prefer a government that employs nurturant parent morality.

Recent work using Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory (MFT) offers yet another perspective. *Koleva et al.* (2012) argued that political differences could best be explained by attention to five innate psychological systems (or “foundations”) centered on harm/harm, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity. Although these systems are present in all individuals, different cultures emphasize different foundations, leading to a wide variety of moral systems. These systems, in turn, shape political views, with liberals primarily emphasizing harm and fairness, but conservatives valuing all five foundations more equally (*Graham et al.*, 2009). Using a large convenience sample, *Koleva et al.* (2012) found that different moral foundations predicted positions on a variety of divisive issues, but that concerns with purity in particular were powerful indicators of political views.

Finally, scholars have studied human conceptions of the desirable – or values – a concept that has implications for the prescriptive (vs. proscriptive) aspects of morality (*Vaisey and Miles*, 2014). The most prominent theory of values was given by *Schwartz* (1992, 2012), who argued that 10 value types are present in most (if not all) cultures: security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, universalism, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power. Some scholars have divided this set into socially oriented, “moral” values (universalism, benevolence, conformity, security, tradition) and self-focused “non-moral” values (hedonism, self-direction, power, achievement, stimulation; *Schwartz*, 2007; *Sverdlik et al.*, 2012). In contrast, *Vaisey and Miles* (2014) argue that both sets of values map onto existing moral typologies, indicating that all values can be moralized. For example, the “non-moral” values of power and achievement have affinities with the utilitarian individualism described by *Bellah et al.* (1996), while stimulation and self-direction correspond to what they refer to as expressive individualism. Rather than adjudicate between these views, we opt to include all values to avoid omissions that may later prove relevant.

People vary in which values they endorse most strongly, and this variation has been shown to predict a variety of outcomes, including political outcomes. For example, universalism, security, and tradition strongly predicted participation in environmental, peace, and/or animal rights organizations across Europe (*Schwartz*, 2010), while universalism, benevolence, and self-direction predicted leftist voting in the 2001 and 2006 Italian elections (*Caprara et al.*, 2006; *Schwartz et al.*, 2010). Using a related values paradigm, *Baker* (2005) and *Baker and Boudens* (2009) found that values also predicted political behavior in the United States. Those holding secular-rational or self-expression values (which are related to Schwartz's self-direction, stimulation, and universalism) were more likely to participate in political acts such as signing a petition or voting, but were less likely to self-identify as or vote Republican.

3.2. Comparing theories of morality and politics

The four theories share a number of conceptual similarities, despite their origins in different disciplines. *Baker and Boudens* (2009:87), for instance, point out that valuing tradition (*Schwartz*) often means endorsing moral absolutism (*Hunter*) and aspects of strict father morality (*Lakoff*), including a healthy respect for authority (MFT). Similarly, nurturant parent morality (*Lakoff*) emphasizes self-fulfillment and concern for others, bringing it in line with values such as self-direction and universalism, as well as moral foundations of harm and fairness. This suggests that concepts from each of the four theories might be manifestations of one or more general moral constructs. To the extent that this is true, the theories become complementary rather than competing explanations of political differences.

¹ Curiously, *Hunter* himself does not discuss moral absolutism or its counterpart moral relativism, though his description of the traditionalist and progressivist positions make it clear that these concepts are a key dividing difference (*Baker*, 2005).

However, theory-specific variables also seem to occupy unique conceptual space. Tradition may be related to absolutism and strict father tendencies, for example, but can also be tied to rituals, behavioral norms, and the development of certain character traits (e.g., humility, devotion, c.f., Schwartz, 2012). Unique elements such as these in theory-specific moral constructs means that there is no *a priori* reason to believe that one framework completely subsumes any other; rather, it seems more plausible that constructs contribute to explaining political variation both uniquely, and in conjunction with related variables. The extent to which this is true for a given construct, the nature of any shared components, and the relative explanatory power of unique vs. shared contributions are all questions requiring empirical investigation.

Let us now step back to reconsider our overarching question. What accounts for the political differences in American politics? A number of scholars have proposed that morality plays a crucial role but have highlighted different facets, leaving us with little sense for how well morality predicts political differences overall, and which moral constructs matter most. Ultimately, we need a side-by-side comparison of constructs from the four theories to determine which are most useful for understanding political variation.

4. Methods

4.1. Data

Data come from the Measuring Morality (MM) study, a nationally representative survey of adults in the United States conducted in 2012. Questions include scales designed to tap various facets of morality as well as demographic and political information about respondents. Morality scales were chosen through the collaborative effort of scholars from psychology, sociology, and linguistics.² To maximize the number of moral constructs included on the survey, contributing scholars were asked to shorten their measures – this means that the measures used in this study represent short-form versions of scales appearing in previous studies. Data were collected by Knowledge Networks (KN), and demographic and political data taken from the profile data collected at the time respondents were first recruited into the KN survey panel. KN originally sampled 2492 respondents for this study, and received 1519 completed surveys (61% response rate).

The MM data include a shortened version of the recently developed Moral Foundations Sacredness Scale (MFSS), but preliminary data checks suggest that this scale suffers from strong method effects that can overwhelm its substantive content. We therefore used multiple imputation to “transfer” the more widely used 20-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ20) from another nationally representative survey to the MM data, and used the MFQ20 instead ($m = 200$ imputations). This approach treats the unasked MFQ20 items as missing data, and uses variables that are common to both data sets to fill in plausible values. Variable transfers such as this have been successfully used in a variety of studies (e.g., Brenner, 2011; Caren et al., 2011; Luks and Elms, 2005), and have performed well in methodological tests (Gelman et al., 1998; Todosijević, 2012). Multiple imputation also allowed us to retain almost the entire sample, less 11 cases that had to be excluded for technical reasons, bringing the final sample size to 1508. Full details are given in Appendix A.

We took several steps to improve the quality of responses. As noted, many items were taken from previously validated scales, and where this was not possible scholars working in the relevant theoretical traditions developed their own scales. Surveys were administered online to reduce social desirability effects, and all scales (and questions within scales) were presented in random order to reduce ordering effects (Krosnick, 2000). Respondents were drawn from KN's panel, suggesting that they had prior experience taking surveys. Practice at completing surveys has been shown to improve reporting accuracy (Chang and Krosnick, 2009).

4.2. Measures

To facilitate the flow of the argument, we describe all measures briefly below, and provide full coding information in Appendix A.

4.2.1. Political outcomes

We selected two political outcomes for their ability to distinguish between general left–right political orientation – self-rated levels of liberalism/conservatism, and political party affiliation, both measured on a 7-point scale. *Conservatism* is the average of these items, with high values suggesting conservative orientation, and low values indicating liberal orientation. This measure does not capture all possible differences between the political left and right – ideally we would also have measures of specific issues such as abortion or immigration – but provides a window into two important and widely recognized dimensions of the conservative-liberal continuum.

4.2.2. Morality measures

Two measures were used to represent Hunter's theory.³ *Moral absolutism* taps moral absolutism (vs. relativism, $\alpha = 0.85$), while the second measures perceptions of divine authority ($\alpha = 0.85$). The latter measure represents a religious base of moral

² Names and information of these collaborators can be found on the project website: <http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/attitudes/resources/measuring-morality/>.

³ All scale alphas except those for MFQ20 items refer to the original (unimputed) data.

authority. While this is narrower than Hunter's focus on "transcendent authority," it is a common and influential sub-type (e.g., Davis and Robinson, 2006) – so common, in fact, that for many traditionalists transcendent authority and God are synonymous (c.f., Baker, 2005, chapter 3). Lakoff's theory was operationalized using recently developed measures of Strict Father ($\alpha = 0.78$) and Nurturant Parent ($\alpha = 0.48$) morality (Wehling et al., n.d.). Measures for MFT were taken from the MFQ20, which returns one measure each for care ($\alpha = 0.50$), fairness ($\alpha = 0.68$), loyalty to the ingroup ($\alpha = 0.47$), authority ($\alpha = 0.64$), and purity ($\alpha = 0.72$; Graham et al., 2011). Finally, we used Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) to measure values. The PVQ returns 10 subscales, each tapping one value domain. These are conformity ($\alpha = 0.66$), tradition ($\alpha = 0.45$), benevolence ($\alpha = 0.66$), universalism ($\alpha = 0.65$), self-direction ($\alpha = 0.54$), stimulation ($\alpha = 0.72$), hedonism ($\alpha = 0.73$), achievement ($\alpha = 0.76$), power ($\alpha = 0.57$), and security ($\alpha = 0.56$). Correlations among all morality variables are shown in Table 1.

Given that Hunter's and Lakoff's theories were formulated to explain political differences and that MFT has largely been applied to achieve the same end, one potential concern is that morality measures contain political content that will artificially inflate correlations with the outcomes. However, a careful examination of the scale measures (given in Appendix A) indicates that this is unlikely: measures for Hunter and Lakoff are not political, and only 1 item from the PVQ contains explicitly political content (a security measure about the role of government in ensuring the safety of citizens). Several items from the MFQ20 contain political content, but in all cases they are combined into subscales with non-political items. Furthermore, measures with political content are never the strongest predictors (see below), suggesting that if artificial inflation is occurring, its substantive effects are minor.

4.2.3. Demographic variables

Demographic variables included measures of gender, race (black, Hispanic, other, with white as the reference category), marital status, education (high school, some college, bachelor's degree, masters degree or above, with less than high school as the reference category), age, and residence in the Southern census region. Three variables tapped religious affiliations likely to correlate with political views. These were dichotomous indicators for conservative Christians (Pentecostal, Mormon, Baptist), self-identified "other Christians," and those professing no religious faith.

4.3. Analyses

We proceed in two phases. First we pose the general question of whether moral concerns make a substantial contribution to our understanding of political differences in the general adult population of the United States. To answer this question, we regress *Conservatism* on all morality variables and calculate the total variance explained. We compare these results to analyses performed using only demographic variables as predictors to give a sense of the magnitude of the findings.

The second phase addresses the theoretical question: "What are political differences really about?" To answer this question, we must recognize that morality measures can potentially explain political variation in two ways: by tapping facets of morality that are unique to a given theory, and/or by serving as indicators for one or more latent moral constructs that cross-cut theoretical traditions. Fully assessing the contributions of each theory will require us to explore both possibilities. We first perform an exploratory factor analysis to identify latent moral constructs, and then use factor scores from this analysis to predict *Conservatism*. To examine unique contributions, we regress *Conservatism* on all morality measures. Because shared variance is not used in estimating regression coefficients, this approach allows us to compare the effects of those facets of morality that are unique to each theory. Standardized coefficients from the two regressions are compared to assess the relative influence of shared and theory-specific measures of morality on political orientation. Finally, we examine whether controlling for demographic variables alters the substantive findings.

All regression models were estimated using ordinary least squares, weighted using the composite weights provided by KN, and used heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors (Long and Ervin, 2000).

5. Results

Table 2 presents weighted descriptive statistics for the sample. Half the respondents are female, 10% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 6% of another non-White racial category. On average, respondents are 50 years old, have completed high school and some college, and make between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year. About 60% are married and 35% live in the South. Religiously, 21% belong to a conservative Christian denomination, 11% report being an "other" Christian, and 15% report no religious affiliation. Respondents are about evenly split between the political left and right.

5.1. Phase I: how much does morality matter for political orientation?

Fig. 1 displays the R^2 values for the regression of *Conservatism* on all morality measures. In the full sample, these measures accounted for 33% of the variance in political orientation. By way of comparison, gender, race, education, income, age, marital status, religious affiliation, and residence in the South explained 21% of the variance (not shown). This suggests that morality constructs typically predict political left–right placement better than basic demographic variables.

But are these results being driven by those on the extreme ends of the political spectrum? To test this, we re-estimated these models after excluding the 97 individuals who self-reported being "extremely liberal" or "extremely conservative" (see

Table 1
Correlations among morality variables.

Hunter	1. Divine authority	1.00																			
	2. Moral absolutism	0.15	1.00																		
Lakoff	3. Nurturant parent	−0.08	0.07	1.00																	
	4. Strict father	0.41	0.08	0.20	1.00																
MFT	5. Care	0.05	−0.07	0.19	0.10	1.00															
	6. Fairness	0.00	−0.03	0.20	0.07	0.53	1.00														
	7. Ingroup	0.20	0.05	0.08	0.17	0.34	0.38	1.00													
	8. Authority	0.27	0.16	0.07	0.25	0.26	0.35	0.54	1.00												
	9. Purity	0.35	0.21	0.03	0.25	0.32	0.32	0.44	0.50	1.00											
Values	10. Conformity	0.00	−0.11	0.32	0.06	0.34	0.44	0.18	0.13	0.09	1.00										
	11. Tradition	0.16	0.01	0.30	0.19	0.29	0.29	0.26	0.25	0.19	0.53	1.00									
	12. Benevolence	0.32	0.10	0.09	0.33	0.18	0.20	0.31	0.42	0.34	0.28	0.40	1.00								
	13. Universalism	0.36	0.04	0.11	0.32	0.19	0.19	0.32	0.35	0.35	0.30	0.48	0.53	1.00							
	14. Self-direction	0.00	−0.10	0.17	0.08	0.14	0.22	0.08	0.11	0.03	0.43	0.39	0.18	0.23	1.00						
	15. Stimulation	−0.09	−0.16	0.13	0.01	0.05	0.13	0.07	0.02	−0.08	0.36	0.28	0.06	0.11	0.48	1.00					
	16. Hedonism	−0.06	−0.12	0.05	0.05	−0.04	−0.03	0.01	0.02	−0.07	0.11	0.15	0.20	0.11	0.29	0.40	1.00				
	17. Achievement	−0.07	−0.14	0.11	0.05	0.08	0.11	0.13	0.13	0.00	0.25	0.30	0.26	0.18	0.42	0.48	0.64	1.00			
	18. Power	−0.05	−0.20	0.05	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.09	0.08	−0.06	0.24	0.26	0.14	0.15	0.39	0.56	0.48	0.49	1.00		
	19. Security	0.24	−0.08	0.07	0.29	0.23	0.22	0.24	0.31	0.25	0.38	0.44	0.51	0.47	0.28	0.10	0.23	0.27	0.26	1.00	

Table 2
Weighted sample description.

Variable	Mean	SD	Variable	Mean	SD
<i>Political factor</i>			<i>Morality variables</i>		
Conservatism	4.06	1.59	Hunter – Divine authority	4.69	1.79
<i>Political indicators</i>			Hunter – Moral absolutism	0.00	1.00
Conservative	4.21	1.46	Lakoff – Nurturant parent	5.28	0.86
Party	3.91	2.13	Lakoff – Strict father	5.22	1.04
<i>Morality variables</i>			<i>Demographics</i>		
MFT – Care	3.27	0.82	Female	0.50	–
MFT – Fairness	3.58	0.78	Black	0.10	–
MFT – Ingroup	2.94	0.80	Hispanic	0.11	–
MFT – Authority	3.52	0.78	Other race	0.06	–
MFT – Purity	3.11	0.99	High school	0.31	–
SV – Conformity	4.07	1.15	Some college	0.27	–
SV – Tradition	4.15	1.06	Bachelors degree	0.19	–
SV – Benevolence	4.68	0.95	Masters or higher	0.14	–
SV – Universalism	4.50	0.92	Income	12.09	4.37
SV – Self-direction	4.41	1.00	Age	50.25	16.70
SV – Stimulation	3.52	1.17	Married	0.60	–
SV – Hedonism	3.57	1.17	South	0.35	–
SV – Achievement	3.59	1.24	Conservative Christian	0.21	–
SV – Power	3.08	1.11	Other Christian	0.11	–
SV – Security	4.32	1.09	No religion	0.15	–

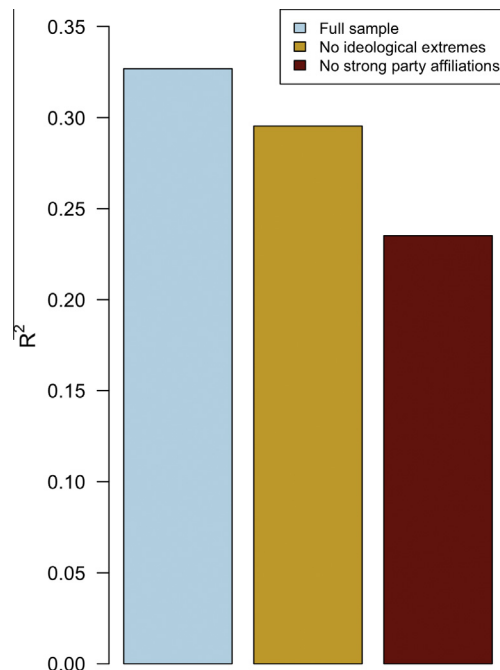


Fig. 1. R^2 for regressions of political orientation on morality variables.

Fig. 1), and found that morality variables still predicted 30% of the variance in political orientation. We obtained similar results when repeating the analysis after dropping respondents who declared themselves a “strong Republican” or “strong Democrat” ($N = 511$) – in this case, morality variables explained nearly one-quarter of the variance (24%). Although the drop in explanatory power in both cases suggests that moral concerns are particularly salient among extreme partisans, the fact that these decreases are relatively minor indicates that moral concerns are also important determinants of political orientation among the more moderate majority.

5.2. Phase II: which theories best predict political variation?

Recall that constructs from each of the four theories can explain political orientation both uniquely, and/or in conjunction with other variables. The first step in determining the utility of each theory, then, is to identify latent moral constructs. To do

this, we performed an exploratory factor analysis of the morality measures with promax rotation. VSS and parallel analyses suggested retaining 2–5 factors (Hayton et al., 2004; Revelle and Rocklin, 1979); we retained 3 after verifying that the 3 factor solution provided the most interpretable solution.

Loadings from the final analysis are presented in Table 3, with loadings >0.30 shown in bold. The first factor taps concern with order, be it from a transcendent source (divine authority), a family (strict father morality), or cultural or organizational customs (tradition). It also captures the related constructs of conformity – which is necessary to preserve order – and security, which could be seen as a desirable result of maintaining order. Conceptually, this factor bears a strong resemblance to right-wing authoritarianism, which emphasizes submission of the individual to legitimate authority structures including social norms, institutions, and leaders (Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013). The second factor concerns focus on others, both those with whom one is acquainted (benevolence) and people generally (care, fairness, universalism, nurturant parent morality). The third factor is defined largely by the values of stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power, all of which represent self-focused interests.

For use in further analysis, we generated scores for each of the three factors using the scoring algorithm suggested by ten Berge and colleagues which ensures that correlations among factor scores match the correlations among the factor themselves (Grice, 2001:433). Scores are highly correlated with the underlying factors, indicating that they are adequate representations of the latent moral constructs ($\rho_1 = 0.92$, $\rho_2 = 0.90$, $\rho_3 = 0.92$). We refer to these scores as *Order*, *Other-focus*, and *Self-focus*.

The next step is to determine the contributions of these factors compared to the moral components unique to each theory. Model 1 of Table 4 displays fully standardized coefficients from a regression of *Conservatism* on *Self-focus*, *Order*, and *Other-focus*. Unique contributions are assessed in model 2, which regresses *Conservatism* on all morality variables (recall that shared variance among predictor variables is not used in estimating coefficients).⁴

Table 4 makes it clear that understanding the moral sources of political variation requires using constructs from multiple theories. The strongest predictors are *Order* ($\beta = 0.37$) and *Other-focus* ($\beta = -0.27$), both of which draw on variables that crosscut theoretical traditions. Substantively, *Order* is positively tied to political conservatism – consistent with prior work on right-wing authoritarianism (e.g., Wilson and Sibley, 2013) – while *Other-focus* predicts greater liberalism. Yet even after these factors are taken into account, each theory makes unique contributions. The strongest unique effect is *Universalism* from the values tradition ($\beta = -0.23$), which predicts a more liberal orientation, but predictors representing Hunter's theory and MFT also make substantial contributions. These include *Divine authority* ($\beta = 0.17$), *Moral absolutism* ($\beta = 0.18$), and *Purity* ($\beta = 0.15$), all of which predict greater conservatism, as well as *Care* ($\beta = -0.20$) which predicts greater liberalism. The effects of *Divine authority*, *Purity*, *Universalism*, and *Care* are particularly noteworthy given that these variables also load heavily onto the morality factors, and so their unique effects represent only a portion of their total predictive power. Lakoff's items make less of a unique contribution, with only *Strict Father* returning a marginally significant effect of modest size ($\beta = 0.08$). Taken together, these results indicate that understanding political orientation requires us to view the four theories as complementary rather than competing explanations.

How does moral influence fare when controls for demographic variables are added? Fig. 2 displays the effect sizes for statistically and marginally significant effects from models that include only morality variables, and models including both morality and demographic variables. *Order*, and *Other-focus* continue to have the largest (standardized) coefficients for both outcomes, but otherwise no pattern appears evident in the results. The influence of some morality measures decreases in the presence of demographic controls, while for others it increases. In a two cases effects that were originally significant become non-significant (*Benevolence*, *Hedonism*). These analyses do not allow us to determine if these changes occur because morality variables are mediating demographic effects, or if their interrelations are the result of mutual dependence on unmeasured variables. Even still, what is most striking about Fig. 2 is how independent the effects of morality and demographic variables seem to be. Except in rare cases, controls do little to alter the substantive magnitude of morality's influence on political outcomes, and in most cases the relative ordering of effects is preserved.

Results to this point suggest that each theory of morality contributes to our understanding of political differences both uniquely, and in conjunction with concepts from other theories. Yet this creates an interpretive challenge: what does an effect of, say, purity or universalism mean once you have removed the elements shared with other theories? To answer these questions, first recall that most moral constructs cover a broad conceptual space – purity, for instance, is concerned with both biological and social/metaphorical forms of contamination (Graham et al., 2009) – and the scales are designed to measure this. Consequently, we might be able to identify the facets of each construct that account for its unique predictive power by examining which of the individual items used to measure it are related to *Conservatism*. Table 5 presents these relationships for the morality variables that make the strongest unique contributions. Results were obtained by regressing *Conservatism* on each item separately while controlling for all other morality subscales (note that *Absolutism* is not included, as it does not load heavily onto any morality factors and so its interpretation remains straightforward).⁵

Table 5 reveals that both items that make up *Divine authority* return estimates of comparable size, suggesting that the distinction of interest is not between the concepts represented by the two scale items, but rather between the items and *Order*, the factor they load most heavily onto. Both are concerned with social organization, but the two scale items expressly

⁴ Because the factors are constructed from the morality variables, the two sets of predictors are perfectly collinear and must be modeled separately.

⁵ Items from the same subscale were not included, as these would control away the shared variance that analyses are designed to explain.

Table 3

Factor loadings for latent constructs derived from morality variables.

	Factor 1 – Order	Factor 2 – Other-focus	Factor 3 – Self-focus
<i>Hunter</i>			
Divine authority	0.64	–0.21	–0.11
Moral absolutism	0.25	–0.11	–0.22
<i>Lakoff</i>			
Nurturant parent	–0.04	0.35	0.04
Strict father	0.52	–0.12	0.04
<i>MFT</i>			
Care	0.05	0.64	–0.16
Fairness	0.00	0.76	–0.16
Ingroup	0.41	0.29	–0.09
Authority	0.56	0.16	–0.07
Purity	0.56	0.17	–0.23
<i>Values</i>			
Conformity	0.69	–0.04	0.18
Tradition	0.64	0.04	0.13
Benevolence	0.29	0.36	0.24
Universalism	–0.03	0.63	0.18
Self-direction	0.00	0.26	0.48
Stimulation	–0.15	0.16	0.63
Hedonism	0.02	0.00	0.68
Achievement	0.11	–0.07	0.76
Power	0.12	–0.28	0.78
Security	0.51	0.08	0.25

Table 4

Linear regressions of conservatism on theory-specific and theory-crosscutting moral predictors.

	1. Common factors		2. Unique contributions	
	Beta	SE	Beta	SE
<i>Common factors</i>				
Self-focus	–0.10	0.06		
Order	0.37	0.05 ^{***}		
Other-focus	–0.28	0.05 ^{***}		
<i>Hunter</i>				
Divine authority			0.16	0.03 ^{***}
Moral absolutism			0.18	0.05 ^{***}
<i>Lakoff</i>				
Nurturant parent			–0.08	0.06
Strict father			0.08	0.05 [†]
<i>MFT</i>				
Care			–0.20	0.08 ^{**}
Fairness			–0.08	0.09
Ingroup			0.03	0.08
Authority			0.09	0.09
Purity			0.15	0.07 [†]
<i>Values</i>				
Conformity			0.04	0.05
Tradition			0.03	0.05
Benevolence			0.13	0.06 [†]
Universalism			–0.23	0.07 ^{***}
Self-direction			0.06	0.05
Stimulation			0.06	0.05
Hedonism			–0.09	0.05
Achievement			–0.07	0.05
Power			0.06	0.05
Security			–0.04	0.06

Beta = fully standardized coefficient.

† $p < .10$.† $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.*** $p < .001$.

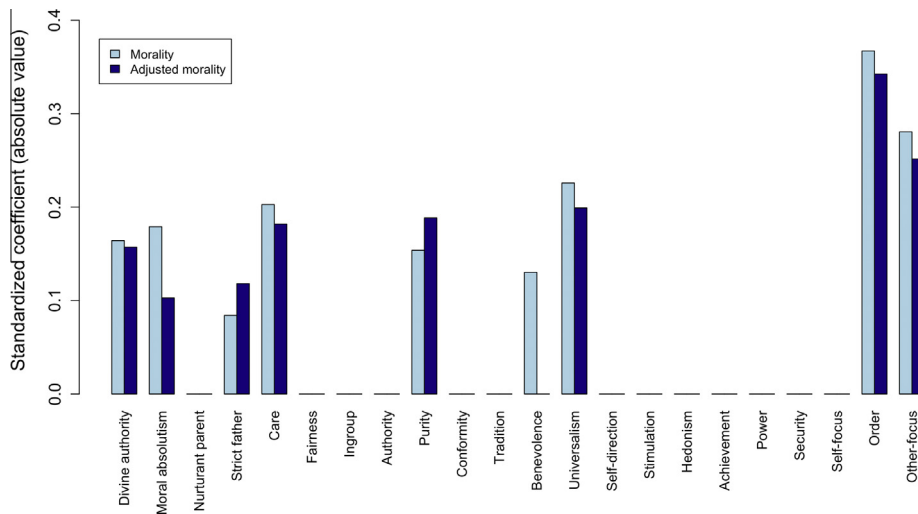


Fig. 2. Magnitudes of fully standardized coefficients from regressions of conservatism on morality variables and morality factors, before and after demographic adjustments. Note: Adjusted morality refers to the absolute value of fully standardized coefficients for morality variables from models that included both moral and demographic predictors.

identify God as the source of that order. This suggests that for some conservatives morality is about more than simply creating a predictable and organized society, something that any authority structure might establish. Rather, order must be generated in way that is consistent with God's laws.

Differences among scale items prove more informative for other morality subscales. For the *Strict father* scale, the major unique predictor of *Conservatism* is the item linking discipline to a child's character, not the items implying punishment or straightforward submission to authority. This indicates that, net of whatever uses discipline has for maintaining order, the issue for conservatives is not so much parental control as teaching self-control as a morally desirable end in itself. Conservatism is also linked to concerns for purity, but this effect seems to be entirely due to activities that are perceived as "unnatural." The exact meaning this word had for participants is unclear, but it seems apparent that it does *not* refer to behaviors that are merely disgusting, as the two items directly addressing disgust are not significant predictors.

Table 5 also helps us understand the unique contributions of care and universalism, both of which are tied to greater liberalism. The unique effect for *Care* is driven primarily by an item expressing a strict rule against killing, what Hitlin refers to as a moral "Bright Line" (Hitlin, 2008), and to a lesser degree by an abstract endorsement of compassion. For *Universalism*, unique predictive power derives from a desire to care for nature, which is not measured by other morality scales, as well as an item that addresses both equal treatment of others and equal opportunities for all. With regard to the latter measure, the equal opportunities component is unique to the universalism measure, and we suspect it is largely responsible for the predictive power of this item.

6. Discussion

Let us return to the question that motivated this project: What are political differences really about? A number of scholars have argued that political differences in the United States can be traced to moral concerns, and our analyses support this claim. We found that, on average, moral variables accounted for one third of the variance in political orientation, greater than the amount accounted for by basic demographic and religious predictors, and that this result was not driven by those on the extreme ends of the political spectrum. This suggests that even if claims about a "culture war" are overstated, moral differences are still deeply implicated in politics, even among those who are more moderately politicized.

But which moral differences matter most? Four theories provide different answers. Hunter argues that the differences run along lines of moral authority and relativism, while Lakoff traces political differences to moral schemas developed from contrasting family types. Haidt and other MFT scholars argue that the key aspect is the patterns of emphasis on differing moral intuitions, particularly purity, while Schwartz and colleagues point to values such as tradition, universalism, and security. Our results partially support the assertions of all four theories, as constructs that are unique to each theory seem to play a role in shaping political orientation. These include divine authority and moral absolutism (Hunter); a strict father worldview (Lakoff); care and purity concerns (MFT); and universalism and benevolence (values). Considering the unique contributions of each theory alone, however, overlooks the fact that they also share conceptual space, and that these points of intersection are important for understanding political variation. In particular, all four theories seem to tap three moral constructs that we have provisionally called *Self-focus*, *Order*, and *Other-focus*. Two of these, *Order* and *Other-focus*, are the strongest predictors of political orientation, while the third has no relationship. This is consistent with past work in political

Table 5

Unique contributions attributable to individual scale items.

	Beta	SE	Major underlying factor
<i>Divine authority</i>			
Right and wrong should be based on God's law	−0.17	0.03 ^{***}	Order
American children should be raised to believe in God	−0.13	0.03 ^{***}	
<i>Strict father</i>			
I will not have my child talk back to me	0.02	0.04	Order
Children need to be disciplined in order to build character	0.12	0.04 ^{**}	
“Tough love” is required to raise a child right	0.06	0.03 [†]	
Obedience must be instilled in children	0.04	0.04	
<i>Care</i>			
Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue	−0.12	0.06 [†]	Other-focus
It can never be right to kill a human being	−0.20	0.04 ^{***}	
Whether or not someone suffered emotionally ^a	−0.05	0.06	
Whether or not someone was harmed ^a	0.02	0.06	
<i>Purity</i>			
People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed	0.06	0.06	Order
I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural	0.14	0.05 ^{**}	
Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency ^a	0.08	0.06	
Whether or not someone did something disgusting ^a	0.06	0.06	
<i>Universalism</i>			
I think it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. I believe everyone should have equal opportunities in life	−0.20	0.04 ^{***}	Other-focus
It is important to me to listen to people who are different from me. Even when I disagree with them, I still want to understand them	−0.05	0.05	
I strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to me	−0.12	0.05 ^{***}	

Beta = fully standardized coefficient.

^a The original question asked respondents to rate the extent to which these considerations are relevant to their thinking when deciding whether something is right or wrong.[†] $p < .10$.^{**} $p < .05$.^{**} $p < .01$.^{***} $p < .001$.

psychology that links conservatism to concerns for order and authority, and liberalism to novelty-seeking, open-mindedness, curiosity, and concerns for equality (Carney et al., 2008; Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013; Jost et al., 2009).

Digging deeper into the unique contributions of each theory provides additional insights into the moral underpinnings of political ideology. Although conclusions remain speculative, some evidence indicates that conservatives are more likely to view consistency with divine laws, self-control, and behaving in a “natural” way as morally praiseworthy, above and beyond the contributions each make to maintaining social order. This suggests that (certain) conservatives are unlikely to be satisfied with laws that violate what they feel are divinely established standards of right and wrong, regardless of how orderly or safe they make society. Similarly, conservatives might be more likely to resist policies that they see as enabling laziness or condoning self-indulgence, or that allow behaviors they perceive as contrary to the natural order (e.g., homosexuality). For their part, liberals are more likely to view preserving nature, ensuring equal opportunities for all, and preventing the killing of humans as morally important in ways that might not be reducible to a general concern for others. This implies that (certain) liberals are more likely to staunchly oppose the death penalty or resist policies that endanger the environment, regardless of what other benefits they might bring (e.g., jobs). These implications might not be surprising, but are valuable in that they emphasize that well-known differences between liberals and conservatives are often rooted in differing conceptions of morality (c.f., Haidt and Graham, 2007). Moral underpinnings in turn can help explain both the tenacity with which partisans cling to their views, and the ability of elites to successfully appeal to the masses.

Several general points can be made in light of these findings. First, results indicate that moral concerns matter a great deal for American politics. The fact that the general pattern of results persisted in the face of demographic controls suggests that the relationships are robust – moral worldviews are not simply serving as proxies for politically relevant demographic differences. Second, results highlight the moral underpinnings of concepts long used in political research, such as right-wing authoritarianism (c.f., Graham et al., 2009). Finally, this study indicates that none of the existing theories of morality are fully adequate for explaining political variation, as each tells only part of the overall story. Consequently, a more comprehensive theory of morality and politics will require crossing established theoretical boundaries and engaging in the work of theory synthesis and refinement. A key task for this undertaking will be to develop a synthetic framework that can encompass both the similarities and the differences among the moral constructs examined here. It will also be important to determine to what extent these results extend beyond the American context. For example, the link between universalism and leftist political orientation found here has also been uncovered in a number of European liberal democracies, but the relationship is less

consistent in traditional and post-communist nations (Pioro et al., 2011). A similar pattern might exist for other forms of morality as well.

This study raises a number of interesting questions for future research. Results suggest that conservatives are more prone than liberals to endorsing moral absolutism, and past work implies that they are more likely to engage in deontological (i.e., rule-based) forms of moral reasoning (i.e., through religion, Piazza and Landy, 2013). However, liberals in this study were more likely to endorse the statement that “it can never be right to kill a human being,” which seems both absolutist and deontological. This raises the intriguing possibility that absolutist and rule-based forms of morality play an important role in moral judgments for both liberals and conservatives. Future work should examine the extent to which this holds true, both by determining which issues evoke absolutist and deontological beliefs for liberals, and by examining the extent to which these are actually applied in an absolutist and rule-based manner to judgments and behavior. A number of studies have also shown that conservatives are more likely to experience disgust, and that disgust can amplify the effects of morality on judgments (Inbar et al., 2012b; Schnall et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2011). In contrast, our results show that disgust items do not predict political orientation. This may be because the present study only considered unique contributions of disgust (controlling for other morality variables), or because it measured a different facet of disgust than past research. With regard to the latter point, past work typically examines disgust sensitivity or evokes actual disgust, while this study examines the role disgust plays in moralizing actions – that is, in making behaviors seem wrong by virtue of the fact that they evoke disgust. This suggests that conservatives might find more behaviors disgusting than do liberals, but that they are no more likely to therefore conclude that those actions are immoral. Future work could be directed to test this hypothesis.

This study is limited in a number of ways, which suggest additional avenues for future research. First, available measures captured only some of the many possible points of political division, and thereby might miss unique patterns of variation. For instance, substantial research suggests that religious traditionalists (in Hunter’s sense) are surprisingly “liberal” on economic issues like government aid to the poor, while maintaining strong conservative stances on cultural issues such as abortion and sexuality (Davis and Robinson, 2006; Starks and Robinson, 2009). Future work should expand the political outcomes used to better capture these (and any other) counter-intuitive trends. Researchers should also explore divisions that do not neatly fit traditional left–right divides (e.g., Libertarianism). Second, researchers should further investigate the possibility of general moral constructs that crosscut theoretical traditions. At a minimum, this work should replicate the three factors uncovered in this study and determine whether they are robust to the use of different measurement instruments (e.g., Schwartz’s Value Survey rather than the PVQ) and the addition of other theoretically related moral constructs (e.g., the ethic of autonomy, Schweder, 1990). Scholars should also examine how they relate to theoretically similar constructs, such as the dimensions of conservation/openness to change and self-enhancement-self-transcendence that underlie Schwartz’s ten value types (Schwartz, 1992), or right-wing authoritarianism (Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013). Finally, this paper adjudicated between existing theories and measures of morality, but only considered a few non-moral sources of variation in political outcomes. To better understand the role of moral concerns in politics, future work should systematically test the key morality variables identified here in relation to alternative theories of political behavior to determine how they relate, and the relative contributions of different constructs. Productive comparisons could be made to work on identity and implicit influences on political behavior (Ben-Bassat and Dahan, 2012; Friese et al., 2007), civic engagement and social integration experiences during adolescence (McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Settle et al., 2011), and work on the possible biological bases of social (including political) phenomenon (Narvaez, 2008; Oxley et al., 2008), to name a few. So doing, researchers will be able to gain a better understanding of the role morality plays in shaping political attitudes and behavior.

Current theorizing suggests that moral concerns are important predictors of political attitudes and action. Our results are consistent with this claim, and highlight the facets of morality that seem to best differentiate self-placement on the liberalism/conservatism continuum. While it is certainly true that more work needs to be done, the present study provides a reason for social scientists and other scholars interested in political outcomes to consider the moral concerns of both the small, dedicated core populating the ideological extremes and the more moderate masses that fill out the middle of the political spectrum.

Appendix A. “Morality and politics: comparing alternate theories”

A.1. Variable coding

A.1.1. Political variables

Conservative is a self-reported item based on the question “In general, do you think of yourself as . . .” with response options ranging from 1 = Extremely liberal to 7 = Extremely conservative. *Party* (reverse coded) records political party affiliation and runs from 1 = Strong Democrat to 7 = Strong Republican, with the midpoint 4 = Undecided/Independent/Other.

A.1.2. Morality variables

Divine authority is a two-item scale ($\alpha = 0.85$) based on agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree, reversed): “Right and wrong should be based on God’s law;” “American children should be raised to believe in God.” This measures taps a religious base of moral authority – while this is narrower than Hunter’s focus on “transcendent authority,” it expresses a closely related concept. Further, for most traditionalists, transcendent authority and God

are synonymous. *Moral absolutism* is captured using a scale of four items (1 = Strongly agree, 7 = Strongly disagree, $\alpha = 0.86$): “What is right and wrong is up to each person to decide;” “Moral standards should be seen as individualistic: what one person considers to be moral may be judged as immoral by another person;” “Question of what is ethical for everyone can never be resolved because what is moral or immoral is up to the individual to decide;” “Moral standards are simply personal rules that indicate how a person should behave, and should not be used when making judgments of others.” The latter three items are taken from the relativism scale of the Ethics Position Questionnaire (Forsyth, 1980).

Strict Father is a 4-item scale ($\alpha = 0.78$) based on agreement with the following statements: “I will not have my child talk back to me;” “Children need to be disciplined in order to build character;” “Tough love’ is required to raise a child right;” “Obedience must be instilled in children.” *Nurturant Parent* is a 4-item scale ($\alpha = 0.48$) based on agreement with the following statements: “Parents should empower children as much as possible so that they may follow their dreams;” “Children must learn to see the world through other people’s eyes;” “In order to truly nurture children, one needs to be empathic;” “Children shouldn’t feel obligated to harm about the well-being of people they do not know” (reverse coded). All items were rated on a 7-point agree/disagree scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

We used the 20-item version of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ20) to capture construct from Moral Foundations Theory. The questionnaire produces five subscales created by summing scores across 4 items each. The first two ask for agreement with the following statements, on a scale of 0 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree: **Care**: “Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue;” “It can never be right to kill a human being;” **Fairness**: “When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly;” “Justice, fairness and equality are the most important requirements for a society;” **Ingroup**: “People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong;” “It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself;” **Authority**: “Respect for authority is something all children need to learn;” “If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer’s orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty;” **Purity**: “People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed;” “I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.”

The final two items for each sub-scale ask respondents to decide whether certain considerations are relevant when deciding whether something is right and wrong, with response options ranging from 0 = ‘Not at all relevant – has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong’ to 5 = ‘Extremely relevant – is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong.’ These are: **Care**: “Whether or not someone suffered emotionally;” “Whether or not someone was harmed;” **Fairness**: “Whether or not some people were treated differently than others;” “Whether or not someone acted unfairly;” **Ingroup**: “Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group;” “Whether or not someone’s action showed love for his or her country;” **Authority**: “Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority;” “Whether or not someone failed to fulfill the duties of his or her role;” **Purity**: “Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency;” “Whether or not someone did something disgusting.” Respondents were also asked to rate the morality of believing in astrology. This was included as a “catch” question, and consistent with recommended practice, those scoring in the top three categories (i.e., saying that astrology was somewhat, very, or extremely relevant to their judgments of morality) were coded as missing. Cronbach’s alphas for the final subscales were: $\alpha_{\text{harm}} = 0.52$, $\alpha_{\text{fairness}} = 0.71$, $\alpha_{\text{ingroup}} = 0.51$, $\alpha_{\text{authority}} = 0.65$, $\alpha_{\text{purity}} = 0.74$. The low alphas are consistent with prior work (Graham et al., 2009), and represent an effort by the scale creators to capture theoretical breadth rather than increased precision of narrower concepts.

We used Schwartz’s Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) to measure values (for validation studies, see Davidov and Depner, 2011; Davidov et al., 2008). The PVQ asks respondents to read a list of statements and consider how much each “sounds like you.” Response options ranged from 1 = Not like me at all to 6 = Very much like me (reversed). Items were used to form scales representing the 10 values as follows: *Conformity* ($\alpha = 0.64$) – “I believe that people should do what they’re told. I think people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching;” “It is important to me to always behave properly. I avoid doing anything people would say is wrong;” *Tradition* ($\alpha = 0.47$) – “It’s important to me to be humble and modest and not to draw attention to myself;” “Tradition is important to me. I try to follow the customs handed down by my religion and family;” *Benevolence* ($\alpha = 0.65$) – “It’s very important to me to help the people around me. I want to harm for their well-being;” “It is important to me to be loyal to my friends. I want to devote myself to people close to me;” *Universalism* ($\alpha = 0.64$) – “I think it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. I believe everyone should have equal opportunities in life;” “It is important to me to listen to people who are different from me. Even when I disagree with them, I still want to understand them;” “I strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to me;” *Self-direction* ($\alpha = 0.54$) – “Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to me. I like to do things in my own original way;” “It is important to me to make my own decisions about what I do. I like to be free and not depend on others;” *Stimulation* ($\alpha = 0.71$) – “I think it is important to do lots of different things in life. I always look for new things to try;” “I look for adventure and like to take risks. I want to have an exciting life;” *Hedonism* ($\alpha = 0.73$) – “Having a good time is important to me. I like to “spoil” myself;” “I seek every chance I can to have fun. It is important to me to do things that give me pleasure;” *Achievement* ($\alpha = 0.76$) – “It’s very important to me to show my abilities. I want people to admire what I do;” “Being very successful is important to me. I hope people will recognize my achievements;” *Power* ($\alpha = 0.57$) – “It is important to me to be rich. I want to have a lot of money and expensive things;” “It is important to me to get respect from others. I want people to do what I say;” *Security* ($\alpha = 0.55$) – “It is important to me to live in secure surroundings. I avoid anything that might endanger my safety;” “It is very important to me that the government ensures my safety against all threats. I want the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens.”

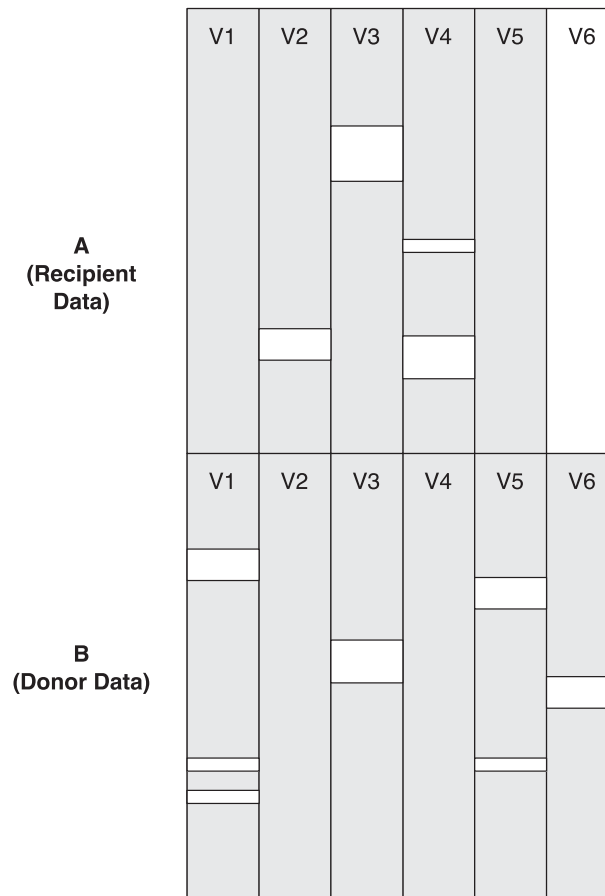


Fig. A1. Data configuration for variable transfer.

A.1.3. Demographic variables

Female, *Black*, *Hispanic*, and *Married* are dichotomous indicators where those self-reporting the named characteristics were coded as 1, and all others 0. *Other race* is a dichotomous indicator indicating which respondents self-reported a racial category that was not White, Black, or Hispanic (and includes those reporting 2 or more non-Hispanic racial categories). *Education* is a 5-point ordinal scale with values 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = college degree, and 5 = professional/graduate degree. *Income* is a 19-point ordinal scale ranging from 1 = less than \$5000 to 19 = \$175,000 or more.⁶ *Age* records respondents' ages in years – analyses using demographic variables also included a squared term to capture curvilinear trends. *South* is a dichotomous variable coded 1 if respondents lived in the Southern census region, and 0 otherwise. Three dichotomous variables tapped religious affiliation, and were chosen to identify traditions likely to correlate with political views. *Conservative Christian* records those who self-identified as Pentecostal, Mormon, or Baptist, while *No religion* codes those who reported having no religion as 1, and others 0. *Other Christian* records respondents who self-identified as “other Christian,” as was included to control for the unknown political tendencies of this group.

A.2. Procedure for transferring MFQ20 to measuring morality data using multiple imputation

Multiple imputation uses information from observed cases to generate plausible values for missing data. When a variable is completely missing, information for imputation must be obtained from an outside data source, which we refer to as a donor data set. This is accomplished by joining the original and donor data and treating them as a single data set for the purposes of imputation (Gelman et al., 1998; Todosijević, 2012). To illustrate, consider Fig. A1, which shows two data sets, A and B. Observed data is shown in grey, and missing data in white. On its own, data set A would be unable to impute values for variable V6, since it contains no cases with information about that variable, but joining A–B adds non-missing cases and

⁶ Income was only reported using the 19 categories in the data. Visual analysis shows no gaps in the distribution, and so we opted to retain the 19 categories to maximize the information used in analyses.

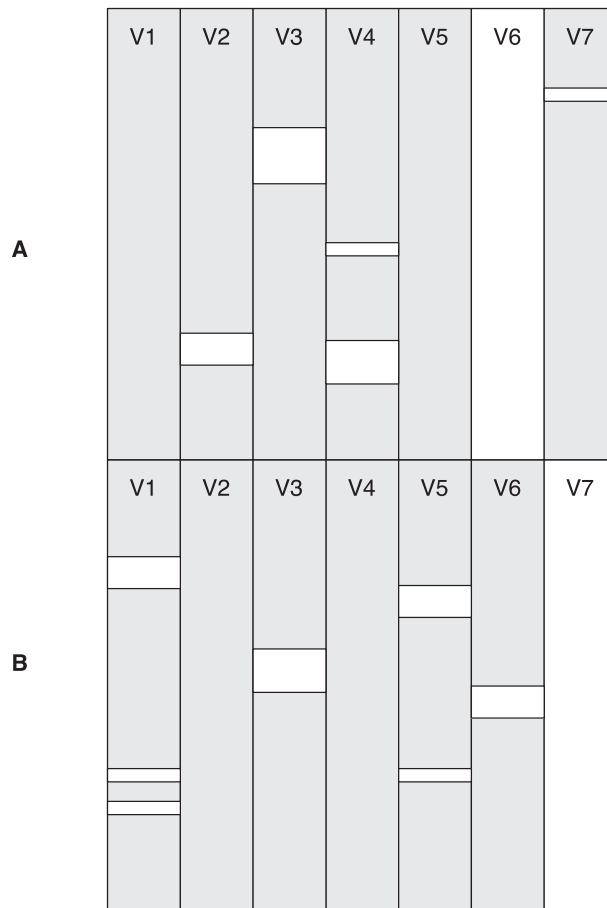


Fig. A2. Illustration of variables never jointly observed.

Table A1
Variables considered identical for imputation purposes.

Construct	Generosity and giving	Measuring morality
Compassion	1 = Strongly disagree, 6 = Strongly agree 1. When one of my loved ones needs my attention, I really try to slow down and give them the time and help they need 2. I am known by family and friends as someone who makes time to pay attention to others' problems 3. I'm the kind of person who is willing to go the "extra mile" to help take care of my friends, relatives, and acquaintances 4. When friends or family members experience something upsetting or discouraging I make a special point of being kind to them 5. When it comes to my personal relationships with others, I am a very generous person 6. It makes me very happy to give to other people in ways that meet their needs	1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree 1. Nurturing others gives me a warm feeling inside 2. I enjoy being a caregiver in my relationships 3. I am a very compassionate person
Putting yourself first	1 = Strongly disagree, 6 = Strongly agree Realistically speaking, you have to take care of yourself first before worrying about the needs of others	1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree Regardless of concerns about principles, in today's world you have to be practical, adapt to opportunities, and do what is most advantageous for you
Importance of religion	1 = Not important at all, 5 = Extremely important (reversed) How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life?	1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree (reversed) 1. My faith is extremely important to me 2. My religious faith impacts many of my decisions
Absolutism	1 = Strongly agree, 4 = Strongly disagree Some people say that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?	Described in the "Variable Coding" section

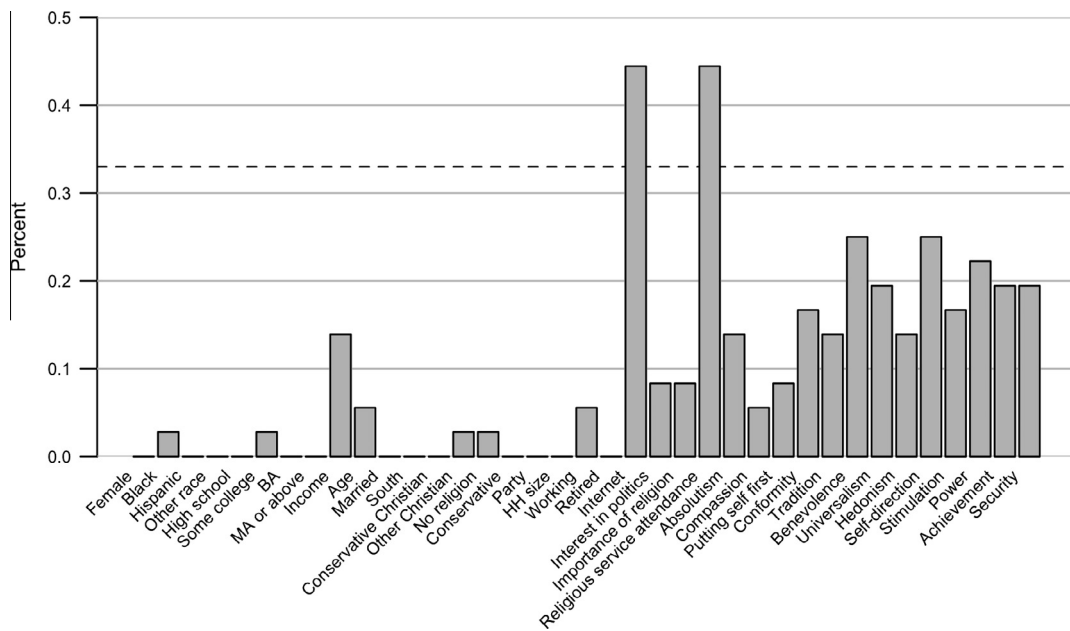


Fig. A3. Percent of linear bivariate relationships that differ between data sets.

makes imputation possible. After imputation, data set A will contain imputed values for V6 that can be analyzed using standard post-imputation techniques.

There are a few points about variable transfers that should be made clear. First, transferring variables is only possible when the donor and recipient data sets have variables in common (variables V1–V5 in Fig. A1). In the best case scenario these variables will be identical across data sets (i.e., based on the same question with the same response options), but might also be different measures of the same constructs. In either case, once the data sets are stacked, matched variables will be treated by the imputation procedure as if they were the same variable. Second, variables usually only transfer in one direction. To see why, consider Fig. A2. Variables V6 and V7 are never observed together, and so the algorithm has no information about their covariance to use in generating imputations. V6 can be transferred from A to B (by removing V7), or V7 from B to A (by removing V6), but not both. The only way to resolve this problem is by adding additional cases in which both variables are observed together (e.g., from a third data set).

Third, the relationship of transferred variables to variables that were not included in the imputation model depends entirely on the variables that were in the imputation model (this is called the problem of conditional independence, c.f., Todosijević, 2012). To see this, imagine that we transferred V6 from data set B to data set A using variables V1–V6 (Fig. A2), then conducted analyses on data set A alone. In particular, say we are interested in the relationship between V6 and V7. V6 might be related to V7 even though the two were not imputed together, since information about that relationship may have entered the imputation procedure through the variables that were in the imputation model (V1–V5). However, the relationship between V6 and V7 will depend *entirely* on those variables, and will disappear if those variables are conditioned on. This suggests that whenever the analysis includes variables that were never jointly observed, researcher need to include more variables in the imputation model than will be used in the analyses.

In the present case, the recipient data set comes from the Measuring Morality (MM) survey, and the donor data set is the nationally representative Generosity and Giving (GG) survey conducted by the Center for the Sociology of Religion at the University of Notre Dame in 2008. Both surveys were collected by Knowledge Networks and contain a common set of demographic and political measures. Measures that are identical in both data sets include the variables *Conservative*, *Party*, *Female*, *Black*, *Hispanic*, *Other race*, *Married*, *High school*, *Some college*, *BA*, *Graduate/Professional*, *Income*, *Age*, *South*, *Conservative Christian*, *Other Christian*, and *No religion* (described in the “Variable Coding” section). They also include items not used in analyses, such as employment status (working, retired), household size, interest in politics, attendance at religious services, and Internet access.

Additionally, we include a number of measure that, while not identical across surveys, arguably tap the same constructs. These include all the value variables, which are measured with single items from the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) in the GG data (with the gender adapted to match the gender of the respondent), but the full 21-item PVQ in the MM data (gender-neutral, see “Variable Coding” section). Other non-identical variables are shown in Table A1, along with their original measurement scales. Items with multiple items listed were formed into a scale by taking the mean of all items.

Question wording suggests that they matched items measure the same underlying constructs, and can therefore be treated as identical for the purposes of imputation. To test this more rigorously, we examined whether the linear relationships

among variables were similar in each data set. In particular, we joined the MM and GG data and created an indicator for which data set each observation came from. We then used linear regression to estimate the relationship between each pair of variables, and tested whether including an interaction with this indicator improved model fit (using the BIC criteria). A significant interaction indicated that the relationship in question differed between data sets. Fig. A3 displays the percent of relationships for each variable that differ between data sets, with a dotted line added at 33% for reference.

Fig. A3 shows that relationships for most variables are similar across data sets – differing by no more than one-third of all relationships – but that half of all relationships involving Internet access and religious service attendance differ across data sets. For this reason, we exclude the latter two variables from the imputation model.

Using the remaining measures, we created a combined data set and used multiple imputation to transfer the MFQ20 subscales from the GG data to the MM data, then retained the MM data for analyses. Because transfers are unidirectional, several analysis variables had to be excluded from the imputation model, and then added back after imputations were complete. These included our measure of divine authority and the two Lakoff scales. This means that missing values in these variables were not imputed, and cases missing data on these variables were removed prior to analyses ($n = 11$).

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