What is Easy and What is Right: Moral Partisan Stereotypes as Shortcuts in Candidate Evaluation

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Abstract

Many of the most iconic political ads in history draw heavily on what social psychologists have termed "Moral Foundations." Moral foundations are deeply held intuitions regarding right and wrong that are valued cross culturally. Previous work has established that partisans are particularly swayed by appeals referencing specific Moral Foundations. Scholars have argued that partisans are relating to moral appeals on an emotional level. Here an alternative theory is presented: rather than reacting emotionally to moral frames, it is instead argued that partisans are assigning a party label to an otherwise ambiguous message based on the frame. This party label is then used as a shortcut in evaluation. It is also theorized that this effect will be particularly noticeable in people who strongly socially identify with their political party. Testing the theory via a survey experiment, partial support for the argument is discovered. In Democrats, strong evidence of a moral stereotype is found. In Republicans, evidence of the stereotype is less clear. In both groups, the moral frame serves as a shortcut in candidate evaluation, as hypothesized. Contrary to the theory presented, however, strength of partisan identification has little influence on use of a partisan stereotype. The findings have implications for campaign strategy and suggest avenues for future research.

1. Introduction

During the 2016 election, candidates spent a shocking 9.8 billion dollars on advertising[15]. In fact, the plurality of a typical candidate's budget went not towards operating costs or overhead fees as one might expect, but rather towards ad buys[17]. When running a campaign, resources are precious. In the realm of elections, effective use of one's resources can many times mean the difference between victory, and thus power over policy, and defeat. Hence, politicians must believe advertising to be a highly effective campaign tactic.

However, relatively little work has been conducted on how, and in some cases whether, advertisements influence individual voters in practice. It is no secret that some ads are more effective than others. The *Daisy* ad and the Swift Boat ads, for example, have been ingrained in the minds of American voters for decades, while most political ads have quickly faded into oblivion. But why is this the case? Why are some political ads so much more effective at influencing voters than others, and how do voters process different kinds of political ads?

Popular culture, and the social sciences alike have deemed the ads mentioned above particularly effective at accomplishing their goal- persuading and mobilizing voters[24]. These ads, though largely devoid of substantive policy references are framed heavily in what social psychologists have termed "Moral Foundations." Here it is argued that the moral frame of these ads is what makes them particularly effective. In particular, it is argued that if the moral frame of an ad is strong enough, it will be sufficient to cue a partisan stereotype, even when no substantive policy positions are present in the ad. Based on the partisan category associated with an ad's moral frame, voters will assign a party label to the candidate depicted in the ad, which is then used to impute other characteristics of the candidate and acts as a beneficial shortcut in candidate evaluation.

Further, it is posited here that the group of voters that morally framed ads target makes them particularly effective. The first goal of any politician seeking office should be to mobilize their base: strong partisans who can be easily convinced to turn out on election day. It is theorized here that while morally framed and policy laden ads are both effective at cueing a partisan stereotype and influencing voters, they differ in the kinds of voters they appeal to. Drawing on Social Identity Theory[25], I argue that while policy laden ads are more likely to influence weak partisans, morally framed ads are more likely to influence strong partisans.

Testing the theory via an online survey experiment, it is found that Democratic subjects have moral partisan stereotypes and will impute a candidate's policy positions based on the moral frame of their political ad, as hypothesized. Evidence of the stereotype being used to impute platform in Republicans is less clear. Evidence is also discovered that the moral stereotype is being used by partisans as a shortcut in candidate evaluation. However, contrary to expectations, no evidence is found to suggest that these relationships are explained by partisans' social identification with political party.

In what follows, a theory of moral partisan stereotyping is presented drawing on existing work surrounding stereotyping, morally framed arguments, and Social Identity Theory. The experimental design employed to test the aforementioned theory and associated hypotheses is then presented and discussed. Results are presented following the discussion of the aforementioned methodology. The paper is then concluded with a discussion of the implications of findings for campaign strategy, resource allocation, and future research in political behavior.

2. Literature Review

Social scientists' interest in the effectiveness of persuasive media appeals is not new. Work on the persuasiveness of media appeals in general[22], and political appeals in particular[19] dates back to the 1940's, long predating the modern social media/ television era. Most of the early work that was conducted on the persuasiveness of political appeals utilized traditional self-report survey questionnaires to establish the effectiveness of political appeals on individual voters and the voting public in aggregate. This early work failed to find significant effects of persuasive appeals on voting behavior, which is perhaps not surprising considering the methodology employed. After all, most individuals are not particularly aware of the exact moment in which they were convinced of their attitudes towards a candidate or policy and, when asked cannot pinpoint a particular ad or moment that was instrumental in the creation of their attitude. Social scientists then, understandably, embraced the idea that the influence of persuasive appeals on the behavior of individual voters was minimal and warranted little consideration in the study of political behavior[16].

More recent research in the fields of political science, social psychology, and communications reaches a vastly different conclusion. In light of methodological advances, recent work has established that exposure to mass media does in fact persuade and mobilize voters, at both the individual and aggregate level[2;8]. Many of these more recent studies have relied on methodologies such as field experiments[8], controlled laboratory or online experiments[2;3;13], and new measures of implicit attitudes and effects of subliminal priming[27].

It has been established that political ads *can* be effective at influencing voters. However, relatively little attention has been given as to *why* so much variation exists between which ads are considered effective by voters, and which are simply annoying. While the public tends to have a negative perception of political ads, the literature is clear that ads are, in fact, influencing voters. Some ads such as the *Daisy* ad, *Dukakis on Crime,* and the *Swift Boat* ads are considered so effective that they changed the course of elections[24]; however most political ads fade into oblivion or, worse backfire and perpetuate a negative image of the candidate who purchased them. Another topic that has yet to receive sufficient attention in the field is *how* individual voters are processing ads and whether variation in processing can be predicted by voter and ad characteristics. Literature from the fields of social and political psychology can provide valuable insight into possible answers to these questions.

2.1 Insights from Social and Political Psychology

2.1.1 moral foundations

The ads noted above as being particularly effective above all draw heavily upon what social psychologists have termed, "Moral Foundations" [9;10]. Moral Foundations are deeply held principles dictating perceptions of "right" and "wrong" that are valued by humans cross culturally. There are currently five proposed moral foundations.

The five foundations currently validated are Care/harm, Fairness/reciprocity, Authority/subversion, Ingroup/loyalty, and Purity/sanctity. Care/harm refers to the extent individuals feel and dislike the suffering of others.

Fairness/reciprocity refers to the extent to which individuals dislike systems that are unfair in nature. Authority/subversion relates to the belief that established authorities (such as law enforcement agents, and even political officeholders) should be respected and followed. Ingroup/loyalty is the belief that one should value those who are members of their own social groups over others, and favor individuals who sacrifice for the good of the ingroup. Purity/sanctity is related to the psychology of disgust and contamination. It can be observed as the belief that the body is a temple that can be contaminated by "immoral," or untraditional acts.

Previous work in the realm of moral psychology has established that the Moral Foundations valued most strongly by liberals and conservatives vary predictably. Liberals tend to value the Care/harm principle above all others, while conservatives value all five foundations more equally. Moreover, it has been established that liberals and conservatives do hold salient stereotypes about the moral values of both in and out partisans, exaggerating moral differences across party lines[9].

Recently, social psychologists have begun exploring whether arguments framed in "liberal" or "conservative" Moral Foundations tend to be more effective at influencing partisans than arguments framed in the other party's Moral Foundations. Feinberg and Willer[4;5] found evidence that partisans are much more likely to support out party policy positions when the policy positions are framed in their own party's morality, as opposed to the other major party's morality. Research also suggests that morally framed arguments can cause partisans to reduce their support for their own party's candidate in a highly polarized election[28].

2.1.2 ambiguity and political persuasion

One notable characteristic of particularly effective political ads throughout history is that, aside from their moral frame, they have been largely ambiguous, providing viewers with few objective characteristics with which to judge the candidate or argument presented. Interestingly, Hersch and Schaffner[13] find that in many cases ambiguity works to a politician's advantage, as voters optimistically ascribe valued characteristics to an ambiguous appeal. Tomz and VanHouweling[26] observed this phenomenon with regards to the perceptions of political candidates, finding that when a candidate is ambiguous, they care more likely to be viewed favorably by voters who project their own valued characteristics on to the candidate.

Moreover, Basinger and Lavine[1] find that voters who feel unambiguously about their political party are more likely to rely on partisan cues in the decision-making process regardless of policy knowledge. It is theorized that this is because it takes less information for unambiguous, strong partisan voters to feel confident in their political classifications of a candidate.

Despite the progress made in recent work, a novel argument is proposed here as to why largely ambiguous, morally framed arguments seem to be so effective at influencing voters, and this argument is applied directly to the realm of political advertising.

3 Theoretical Argument

Drawing on the stereotyping literature[6;7] and work investigating partisan stereotypes as shortcuts in information processing[23], I argue that the ambiguity of morally framed (but policy devoid) appeals works to a politician's advantage, as the moral frame is sufficient in conjuring a partisan stereotype that serves as a beneficial shortcut in information processing.

When people are confronted with an individual with whom they are not well acquainted, they will automatically, and many times subconsciously attempt to place that person into an existing social category[6]. This is similar to what happens when voters view a political ad, especially in local elections when candidates are not previously well known to voters. When a voter views an ad, they are confronted with what is essentially an unknown person. Voters will attempt to categorize the politician just like they would any other person.

When a voter attempts to categorize a politician, they will not consider every objective attribute of the politician or conduct extensive research on the politician's political record, as this would deplete cognitive resources. Rather, voters will rely on shortcuts in information processing in an effort to preserve valuable time and energy[18]. This is typically accomplished by assigning a candidate in an ad to an existing social category based solely on a few easily observable cues. These cues can vary but must be attributes linked strongly enough with an existing social category to trigger use of that category. In the realm of American politics, more often than not, the most salient social categories are parties, such as "Democrat" or "Republican", or categories relating to incumbency such as "incumbent" or "challenger".

In most cases, since ads tend to reference morality or policy that the politician who purchased them favors, the social categories most readily triggered in the mind of a potential voter should be the two major political parties "Democrat" and "Republican" rather than categories relating to incumbency, unless incumbency is explicitly stated. These social categories have salient stereotypes associated with them, and I argue that certain moral convictions are strongly enough associated with the two major political parties to cue a partisan stereotype. To review, cues do not have to be an explicit party label but can be any characteristic of party membership linked strongly enough with the existing party stereotype to trigger use of that stereotype. Since it has been established that American voters do hold stereotypes surrounding the morality of liberals and conservatives[9], it is not unreasonable to surmise that if a moral frame is strong enough, it should be sufficient in conjuring a partisan stereotype. So, here it is surmised that if an ad is framed in stereotypical partisan policy, or morality, the voter viewing the ad should make an initial categorization of the candidate depicted within the ad. Once a potential voter viewing a political ad makes an initial categorization of the candidate depicted, they will either continue to seek objective attributes with which to further categorize the candidate, or if they are not sufficiently interested, will cease further processing of the candidate beyond initial categorization[7].

If a potential voter viewing a political ad is sufficiently interested in the candidate, they will continue to seek objective attributes with which to further categorize them. Objective attributes may be things like policy positions or voting records. It should be noted that by "seeking objective attributes," the author does not mean that sufficiently interested voters will take the time to engage in outside research on the candidate depicted in a political ad; rather that voters will seek objective attributes *already within the ad.* Researching a candidate takes time and cognitive resources that the majority of voters do not have at their disposal. If no objective attributes with which to confirm an initial categorization are present within the ad, it is theorized that strong and weak partisans will respond in different ways. A strong partisan, seeking to easily confirm initial categorization of the politician as a member of their own political party, a group identification that is central to their identity, will artificially project their own valued partisan traits onto the ambiguous candidate in an effort to perceive the candidate as being "like me." However, they will only be motivated to do this if no objective attributes, such as policy stances and vote history, are present within the ad. Once a strong partisan potential voter has artificially assigned their own values to the ambiguous candidate, they will confirm the initial categorization of the candidate and no further processing will be warranted.

Unlike strong partisans, weak partisans, out-partisans and nonpartisans will not be particularly biased in favor of confirming their initial categorization of the candidate depicted. Weak partisans and out partisans do not gain an increase in self-esteem from perceiving the candidate to be a partisan "like me" in the way that strong partisan voters do. Moreover, weak partisans will not be able to access stereotypical in-party traits (of the candidate) as easily as strong partisans, making them much less likely to ascribe them to an ambiguous candidate. For strong partisans, party identification is a salient social identity that is accessed easily, and has stereotypical traits associated with it; this is not necessarily the case for weak partisans.

Based on this logic, strong partisans should have artificially inflated perceptions of ambiguous candidates in morally framed appeals since they will ascribe the party characteristics they value most. When a candidate provides objective attributes in their ad, those attributes may or may not align with the values of the strong partisan voter evaluating them. Therefore, a candidate in an unambiguous that references policy should be evaluated less favorably by strong partisans overall than a candidate in a vague, morally framed ad.

Weak partisans, on the other hand, will be left in a particularly psychologically dissatisfied state by morally framed ads. Morally framed ads lack any objective characteristics with which weak partisan voters can confirm their classification of a candidate. Unlike strong partisans, who will assign their own valued in party traits, weak partisans will simply be left confused and unpersuaded by morally framed ads. Therefore, based on the argument presented we can expect to observe:

Hypothesis 1:

In the aggregate, morally framed ads will provide sufficient information for a partisan stereotype to be cued and used to impute other characteristics of the candidate that are stereotypically associated with their assigned party group, such as platform.

Hypothesis 2:

In the aggregate, potential voters who view a policy laden ad and potential voters who view a morally framed ad will show similar levels of support for the candidate depicted when the policy or morality referenced matches that stereotypically associated with their own partisan group.

Hypothesis 3:

The relationship observed in H1 will be observed not because all partisans are equally likely to impute candidate characteristics based on the moral frame of an ad, but rather because strong partisan voters are particularly likely to use the frame to impute candidate characteristics, while weak partisans are particularly unlikely to do the same.

Hypothesis 4:

The relationship observed in H2 will be observed not because both ads are influencing all partisan voters in the same manner, but rather because strong partisans are particularly influenced by morally framed ads, while weak partisans are particularly influenced by policy laden ads.

4. Empirics

For the purposes of this study, an experimental design will be employed, as it is the only valid approach given the research questions of interest. Survey data would be unlikely to yield results, as a voter is unlikely to be consciously of how a political ad viewed at some point in the past influenced their voting behavior. Further, without an experimental design it would be near impossible to know if the ad, or some other factor affected a voter's attitude towards a candidate.

Evidence of a causal relationship can, however, be obtained via an experimental approach due to the degree of control the researcher has over stimuli and the randomization procedure. Since subjects in a controlled experiment are randomly assigned to groups, it can be concluded that observed differences between groups with regards to outcome variables of interest are *caused* by variation in experimental stimuli rather than some external factor, since randomization should ensure that the groups do not differ significantly aside from assigned condition.

4.1 Experimental Design of the Current Study

Subjects were recruited for participation in a study designed for the sole purpose of answering the research questions at hand. Once informed consent was obtained, subjects were presented with one of four fake radio political advertisements depicting a fictional candidate for congressional office, crafted for the purposes of this study. The only variation between the four ads was one sentence in the middle of the ads that referenced either "liberal" or "conservative" morality, or Democratic or Republican immigration policy positions. All other aspects of the ads from narration to background music remained constant.

The four conditions in this experiment consisted of two control conditions, where subjects were presented with ads framed in either "Republican" or "Democratic" immigration policy, and two control conditions where subjects were presented with ads framed heavily in stereotypical "liberal" or "conservative" morality as identified by Graham, Nosek, and Haidt[9]. Ads in the experimental conditions were completely devoid of substantive policy. Immigration policy was referenced in the policy control conditions due to its high degree of salience and obvious variation between parties, making it highly likely to be sufficient in confirming a partisan stereotype. Likewise, the ad in the "liberal" experimental condition was framed heavily in the Care/harm foundation which has been found to be strongly stereotypically associated with political liberalism, while in the "conservative" experimental condition, the ad was framed heavily in the Loyalty/betrayal foundation, as Loyalty/betrayal has been found to be strongly stereotypically associated with conservatism. Care/harm can be defined as the extent to which people feel and dislike the suffering of others, whereas Loyalty/betrayal can be defined as the extent to which individuals favor their own social groups. In the modern political arena, Loyalty/betrayal can be observed as feelings of extreme patriotism, or even nationalism towards ones' own country[9;10]. In the Republican experimental ad, reference was made to "American values" to cue Loyalty/betrayal, while in the Democratic experimental ad, reference was made to "protecting the vulnerable (in society)," to cue the Care/harm foundation. Scripts of the ads were kept constant aside from reference to morality or policy. Copies of ad scripts can be obtained by email request to the author at acassari@unca.edu.

Once subjects listened to a political ad, they were asked a series of questions regarding their social identification with their own political party and their perceptions of the ad, its effectiveness, and the candidate depicted within it.

4.2 Concepts of Interest

As individual subjects are listening to the political ads in this study, and individual voters must be mobilized for a politician to win an election the unit of analysis in this study is the individual potential voter.

The concepts theorized here to influence the effectiveness of ads also vary over individuals. The main outcome variables in the theory, assumption of candidate platform based on the ad and likelihood of voting for the candidate depicted, can also arguably only be observed at the individual level. To capture whether individual voters are making assumptions regarding candidate platform based on the ad, subjects were simply asked to rate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale with the statement, "This ad gives me a good sense of he candidate's political platform." The scale ranged from 1- Strongly Agree to 5- Strongly Disagree. Likert scales are common in behavioral research and have been deemed reliable and valid in a number of contexts[3]. In addition, subjects were asked, "After listening to this ad, how likely are you to support this candidate in his pursuit of public office," in an effort to gauge how effective the four ads are at accomplishing he politician's goal – getting supporters to the polls. Subjects rated their likelihood of voting for the candidate on a scale ranging from 1- Very Unlikely to 4- Very Likely.

The main predictive variables in this study are the experimental condition, partisan identification of the subject, and subjects' social identification with their political party. As previously mentioned, subjects were randomly assigned to an experimental condition using an algorithm to protect against human error in random assignment. Subject's partisan identification was evaluated via a single item measure of partisanship in which they were asked to identify the political party to which they currently belong. This method for measuring partisanship is similar to others employed and deemed valid in previous works in the field of political psychology[11;12]. After indicating their partisan identification, subjects were asked to complete the Identification with a Psychological Group Scale, or IDPG[21], which has been determined to be both a reliable and valid measure of identification with social group. The IDPG measures the extent to which group membership is part of an individual's identity. Moreover, the IDPG has been deemed a valid measure of identification with a myriad of different social groups, including political parties[20;11;12]. The IDPG consists of ten statements to which respondents rate their agreement on a seven-point scale. Statements are designed to specifically capture the extent to which an individual identifies as a member of a social group. One such statement on the IDPG is, "When someone criticizes this group it feels like a personal insult."

If a subject has completed all items on the IDPG, a composite score is calculated ranging from 0 to 70, with a larger score indicating the strongest possible social identification with political party. Note that depending on one's conceptualization of partisanship, this can be viewed as "strength" of partisanship.

As randomization should ensure that groups are analogous aside from experimental condition, no additional control variables are necessary for ensuring the validity of this study. However, it should be mentioned that, as my sample consists of primarily undergraduate psychology and political science students, results may not be generalizable to American voters in the aggregate. In other words, though the experimental design employed here is clearly advantageous to internal validity, there are some detriments to external validity inherent in controlled experiments.

4.3 Descriptives and Sample Characteristics

Subjects were recruited via the researcher's social media, political science classes, psychology classes, and a university psychology department's research participating web page. Psychology students received course credit for participating. The majority of participants were students at a small public liberal arts university in the southeastern United States at the time of data collection (X bar age = 24.58, sd age = 10.11, 74 percent female, 83 percent white, n = 227).

Seventeen percent of the sample (38 individuals) identified as Republican and forty five percent of the sample (103 individuals) identified as Democratic. The rest of respondents identified with a third party or as non-partisan. Subjects also completed a five level self-rating of their political orientation (as defined as liberalism/ conservatism) that ranged from 1- Very liberal to 5- Very conservative (X bar lib/con = 2.38, sd lib/con = .99). Figure one below is a histogram of sample political orientation. Take not of the rightward skew of the distribution, not only did many subjects identify as Democratic, or non-partisan, but most subjects identified as political liberals While this isn't an ideal scenario for hypothesis testing, this was the most politically diverse sample that could possibly have been attained on the campus where data collection took place, underscoring the need for replication of this study in a more politically diverse sample.
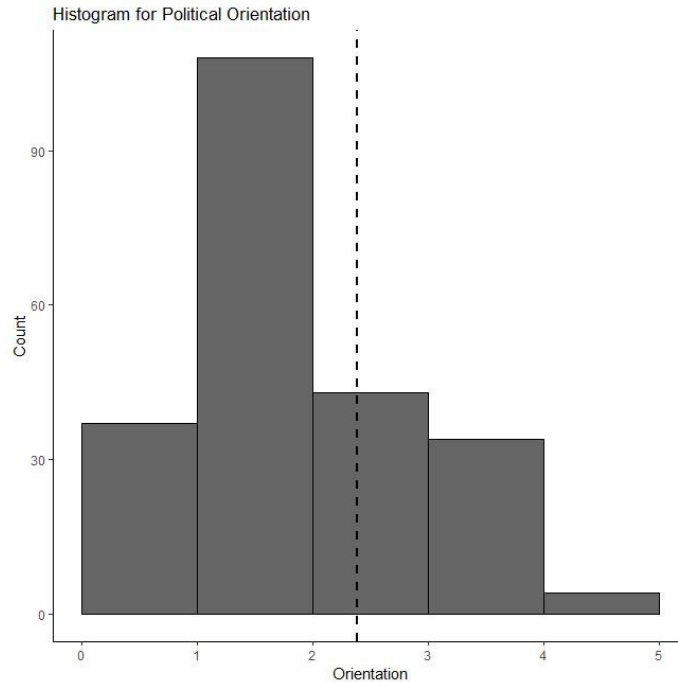
Figure 1

Figure 1: This bar graph displays the sample distribution of political orientation. Note the unimodal distribution skewed right, indicating that the typical individual in my sample leans left. The dashed line displays the sample mean political orientation. Self-rated political orientation ranges from 1- Very Liberal to 5- Very Conservative.

Randomization resulted in sixty participants being placed in the Democratic control condition and receiving an ad based in Democratic immigration policy. Sixty-three participants were placed in the Democratic experimental condition receiving an ad based in Democratic morality. Fifty-five participants were placed in the Republican control condition, receiving an ad based in Republican immigration policy. Fifty-four participants were placed in the Republican experimental condition receiving an ad based heavily in Republican morality.

After listening to their assigned ad, subjects were asked a series of questions designed to capture variables of interest. As previously mentioned, willingness to vote for the candidate depicted in the ad was captured via a single item measure, which asked participants, "After listening to this ad, how likely are you to support this candidate in his pursuit of public office?". Subjects rated their likelihood of supporting the candidate on a scale ranging from 1- Very unlikely to 4- Very likely. Similarly, perception of candidate ideology was captured via a five-point Likert scale in which subjects rated their agreement with the statement, "This ad gives me a good sense of the candidate's political platform." on a scale ranging from 1- Strongly agree to 5- Strongly disagree. Mean, median, and standard deviation of these measures are provided in Table 1 below. Note that most subjects were slightly more likely than unlikely to support the candidate depicted in the political ad, and that most subjects' likelihood of supporting the candidate varied less than a scale point from the mean likelihood of support. This suggests that overall, subjects evaluated the candidate rather favorably. In contrast, most subjects disagreed that the political ad they listened to gave them a good idea of the candidate's political platform.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for Outcome Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Candidate Support	2.37	2.00	.863
Political Platform	3.25	4.00	1.12

Table 1: This table displays summary statistics of the outcome variables. Candidate support is tightly clustered around the mean and median values. Though it initially appears as though more variation exists in perception of platform, when the standard deviation is evaluated in terms of the measure's scale it becomes apparent that the standard deviations of the two measures are approximately equal. On average, subjects were more likely than unlikely to support the candidate depicted in the political ads and were unlikely to agree that the ad gave them a good sense of the candidate's political platform.

Likewise, after completing the previously mentioned measure of political orientation, subjects were asked to complete the IDPG, a measure of identification with social groups that has been used frequently to capture social identification with political party. Scores on the IDPG range from 0 to 70 with a score of 70 indicating the strongest possible social identification with political party. Distribution of sample IDPG scores is provided in Figure 2 below. The mean score on the IDPG was 39.33. Note that IDPG scores within the sample are approximately normally distributed, with the majority of observations deviating less than a standard deviation from the mean value.
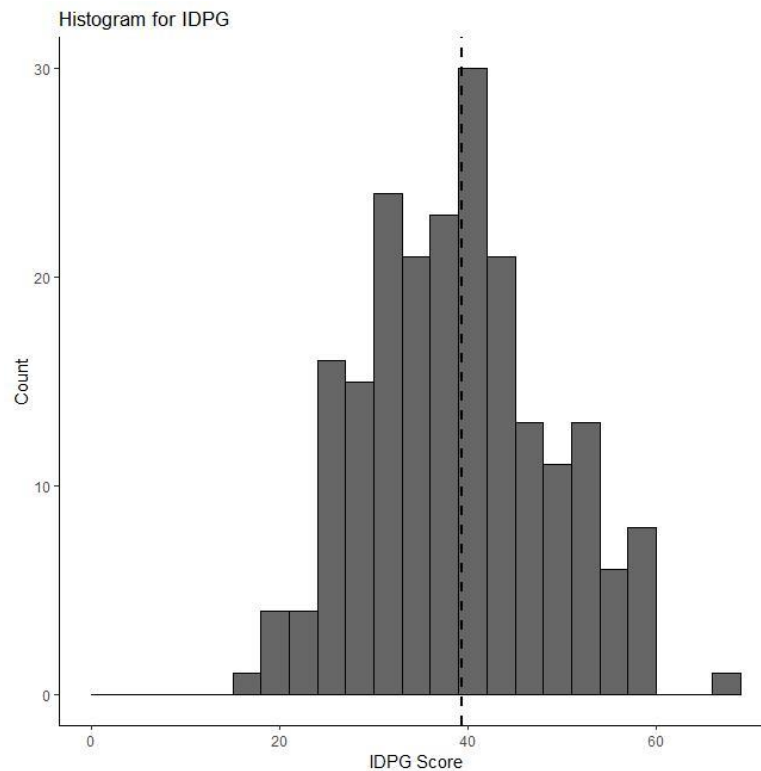

Figure 2. This histogram represents the sample distribution of IDPG scores. Notice that the distribution is approximately normal. The dashed line represents the sample mean.

5. Analysis and Results

In order to evaluate the hypotheses posed earlier, data will be split into partisan subsamples and analyzed via binary and multiple regression. Though this method reduces sample size (to n = 30 Republicans and n = 103 Democrats), eliminating third party and non-partisan subjects allowed for ease of substantive interpretability of models.

5.1 A Moral Partisan Stereotype

In order to evaluate Hypothesis 1, that voters will impute a candidate's political platform based on the moral frame of their political ad, a first order model is specified. The model looks at the effect of the experimental condition on subjects' perception of candidate platform based on the ad. In this regression the intercept is the mean level of agreement with the statement, "This ad gives me a good idea of the candidate's political platform," at baseline (in this model, baseline is the Democratic control condition, which referenced liberal immigration policy explicitly). As a result, the model (equation 1) can be written as:

Platform = β_0 Democratic Control + β_1 Democratic Experimental + β_2 Republican Control + β_3 Republican Experimental + ε (1)

 Unlike in a standard binomial regression with a quantitative independent variable, the coefficients presented here are not estimating a slope per se, but rather are showing how mean perception of candidate platform varies based on experimental condition. As it is hypothesized that a moral partisan stereotype exists, coefficients should either not differ significantly from each other between conditions, or coefficients for the experimental conditions, where morality but not policy was referenced should be significantly less than baseline (since the scale ranges from 1 Strongly Agree to 5 Strongly Disagree).

 Strong evidence in support of the theory is found in the Democratic subsample, with results indicating that voters are not significantly more likely to agree with the statement, "This ad gave me a good idea of the candidate's political platform", in the experimental conditions (β_1 *Democratic Experimental* = .3; β_3 *Republican Experimental* = .235). This indicates that in the experimental conditions, subject's agreement with the statement only decreased by .235- .3 on a five-point scale. Furthermore, this difference is far from statistical significance. These findings indicate that Democratic subjects are using the moral frame to assign a partisan label even, which is then used to impute political platform, even when no substantive policy is referenced. Results of the bivariate regression analysis in the Democratic subsample are presented in Table 2 below.

 In Republicans, evidence of the moral stereotype is slightly weaker. In the Republican subsample, despite small sample size, coefficients near significance (β_1 *Democratic Experimental* = .944; β_3 *Republican Experimental* = .788). It is worth noting that this could be due to the incredibly small size of the Republican subsample causing erroneous results. Coefficients can be interpreted to mean that compared to baseline (the Democratic control condition, which explicitly referenced immigration policy), subjects were nearly a scale point less likely (on a scale ranging from 1-5) to agree that morally framed ads provided them with a good idea of a candidate's political platform. Despite coefficients appearing substantively significant, they do not reach statistical significance, as made evident by their 95 percent confidence intervals containing zero. Results of Model 1 in the Republican subsample are presented in Table 2 below, along with results from the Democratic subsample.

 Taken together, these results provide support for Hypothesis 1, though it is apparent that findings in the Republican subsample need to be replicated in a larger sample. According to these findings, it is rather clear that a moral partisan stereotype is being used to impute candidate characteristics in Democrats, and potentially in Republicans as well (though results in Republicans are open to interpretation).

Table 2: Model 1 Platform by Condition

Variable	Model 1: Democratic (n = 103)	Model 1: Republican (n = 38)
Baseline	3.200	2.500
	(.217)	(.390)
Democratic Experimental	.300	.944
	(.320)	(.536)
Republican Control	-.238	-.300
	(.327)	(.629)
Republican Experimental	.235	.786
	(.331)	(.571)

Table 2: This table displays the results (coefficients followed by standard errors in parentheses) of the first order models in both the Republican and Democratic subsamples. Note the small difference in coefficients between the control and experimental conditions in the Democratic subsample. On a five-point scale, Democrats were only .2-.3 less likely to agree that morally framed ads gave them a good sense of the candidate's political platform compared to policy control ads. This difference is not statistically or substantively significant. In Republicans, results are less clear, while the coefficients are still far from statistical significance, they near substantive significance. Based on the results of this model, there is strong evidence of the moral partisan stereotype in Democrats, while there is some evidence of the stereotype in Republicans the size of the coefficients suggests the need for replication in a larger sample.

5.2 Identification with Party and Use of the Stereotype

In addition to theorizing that a moral partisan stereotype exists within the minds of American voters, it is also hypothesized here that the moral stereotype would be assigned more frequently by individuals who have a strong social identification with political party, due to strong partisans gaining a boost in self esteem from perceiving an ambiguous candidate as a fellow partisan (Hypothesis 3). To evaluate this hypothesis, two separate multiple regressions were run, one in each subsample, building on the previous model. In this case, social identification with political party as measured by the IDPG was added to the model, in addition to interaction effects between condition and IDPG. The interaction between IDPG and condition was included in the model in order to evaluate whether IDPG influences the likelihood a subject in a given condition uses the moral stereotype to impute the political platform of a candidate. The model specified (equation 2) is given below.

$$Platform = \beta_0\ Democratic\ Control + \beta_1\ Democratic\ Experimental + \beta_2\ Republican\ Control + \beta_3\ Republican\ Experimental + \beta_4\ IDPG + \beta_5\ IDPG*Democratic\ Experimental + \beta_6\ Republican\ Control\ *IDPG + \beta_7\ Republican\ Experimental*IDPG + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

Contrary to hypotheses, IDPG seems to add very little predictive utility. Coefficients in the model are far from reaching statistical or substantive significance. Results of Model 2 in both subsamples are provided in Table 3 below. The results suggest that the inclusion of IDPG and IDPG*condition terms in the model is unwarranted.

It should also be noted that the results of this mode, and subsequent bivariate analyses conducted as a result, suggest that in Republicans IDPG varies greatly between conditions. This could be due to broken randomization, meaning that subjects were not distributed randomly across conditions. However, as condition groups are analogous on nearly all other characteristics, it is not unlikely that the manipulation unintentionally influenced how subjects perceived their strength of identification with party. Previous work has demonstrated that social identification with party has been assumed to be fairly stable regardless of external political stimuli[11], whereas political attitudes are viewed to be more malleable. The result of this analysis draws this assertion regarding partisan social identity into question. Though, it

is also not unlikely that the variation in IDPG scores by condition is a corollary of the small size of the Republican subsample.

In the Democratic subsample, results of the model provide a bit more insight. Unlike in the Republican subsample, there was no relationship between condition and IDPG. This could be due to either partisan differences in cognition, or the larger Democratic subsample ensuring the levels of identification with party were more evenly distributed across experimental conditions. This suggests that, contrary to Hypothesis 3, social identification with political party has little influence on whether voters impute a candidate's political platform based on a partisan stereotype. The results can also be taken to mean that identification with party likely has little influence on whether the partisan stereotype is assigned in the first place.

Table 3: IDPG*Condition interaction on Platform

Variable	Model 2: Republicans (n=38)	Model 2: Democrats (n=103)
Baseline	.732	3.079
	(2.101)	(.949)
Democratic Experimental	3.720	-.329
	(2.719)	(1.365)
Republican Control	-1.111	-.626
	(2.795)	(1.45)
Republican Experimental	.026	-.915
	(3.480)	(1.276)
IDPG	.038	.003
	(.044)	(.025)
IDPG*Democratic Experimental	-.067	.015
	(.067)	(.035)
IDPG*Republican Control	.037	.009
	(.064)	(.038)
IDPG*Republican Experimental	.025	.034
	(.082)	(.034)

Table 3: This table displays the results of model 2 (coefficients with standard errors in parentheses) in both the Republican and Democratic subsamples. In the Republican subsample, the baseline coefficient is skewed heavily downward form the first order model due to the strong variation in IDPG by experimental condition. This is likely due to the small size of the Republican subsample resulting in unequal distribution of IDPG between conditions. In both models, coefficients are small and far from statistical or substantive significance. This suggests that the IDPG adds little to the model, and its inclusion is not warranted. These models also provide evidence against Hypothesis 3.

5.3 Moral Stereotypes as Shortcuts in Candidate Evaluation

In addition to theorizing that a moral partisan stereotype exists within the minds of American voters, it is also argued that voters use the moral stereotype as a shortcut in candidate evaluation. According to the theory presented here, partisan voters should be convinced to "vote" for a candidate depicted in a political ad, not because of the

persuasiveness of their in-party morality, but rather because in party morality is used as a shortcut in candidate evaluation (Hypothesis 2).

The argument is tested by specifying a first order model for each partisan subset of voters. The effect of experimental condition on voter's likelihood of supporting the candidate depicted in the political ad is examined. The model (equation 3) is given below:

$$Support = \beta_0 \, Democratic \, Control + \beta_1 \, Democratic \, Experimental + \beta_2 \, Republican \, Control + \beta_3 \, Republican \, Experimental + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

In this model, the intercept represents subjects stated likelihood of voting for the candidate in their question for public office on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all likely) to 4 (Very likely) at baseline (which again is the Democratic control condition). The coefficients represent the change in support based on experimental condition. As it is expected that the results of this model will clearly vary based on subjects' partisanship, two separate models were once again run, one in the Democratic sample in the other in the Republican sample. Based on my theory, subjects should be more likely to support the candidate in their in-party's control and experimental conditions in comparison to the out-party's control and experimental conditions. Results suggest support for this hypothesis as in both subsamples, the ads framed in in party morality and policy significantly increased subjects' likelihood of supporting the candidate.

In Republicans, subjects in the Republican experimental condition were actually .3 points on a four-point scale *more* likely to support the candidate than subjects in the Republican control condition, which referenced Republican immigration policy. Compared to baseline (the Democratic control condition), Republicans were nearly an entire scale point more likely to support the candidate in the Republican experimental condition. Interestingly, compared to baseline (the Democratic control condition), Republicans in the Republican experimental condition were significantly more likely to support the candidate, whereas Republicans in the Republican control condition were not. Results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Candidate Support by Condition

Variable	Model 3: Democratic (n=103)	Model 3: Republican (n=38)
Baseline	2.967	1.889
	(.1418)	(.239)
Democratic Experimental	-.274	.511
	(.208)	(.330)
Republican Control	-1.333***	.566
	(.213)	(.323)
Republican Experimental	-1.184***	.861***
	(.215)	(.349)

Table 4: This table displays the results of model 3 (coefficients followed by standard errors in parentheses) in the Democratic and Republican subsamples. Note that partisans show a preference for in party morality and policy in comparison to out party policy and morality. This effect is particularly strong in Democrats. Democrats are more than a scale point less likely to support the candidate in the Republican control and experimental conditions (on a scale ranging from 1-4), regardless of whether the candidate's ad references stereotypical "Republican" morality or policy. Republicans displayed a similar pattern but seemed to be *more* persuaded to support the candidate by morality than policy (though further research is needed to verify the significance of this pattern). Note that ** indicates significance at p < .01 and *** indicates significance at p < .001

In Democrats, a similar pattern emerges. Democratic subjects are significantly less likely to support the candidate in the Republican control *and* experimental conditions. Interestingly, the effect of Republican morality on Democrats is actually slightly (but likely not significantly) greater than the effect of Republican policy. Democrats are more than a point (on a scale ranging from 1-4) less likely to support the candidate in the "Republican" conditions compared to baseline; while Democrats in the Democratic experimental condition were note significantly less likely to support the candidate, even though no references to policy were made. Results of Model 3 for Democrats are presented in Table 4, along with the results of Model 3 for Republicans.

Consistent with expectations (Hypothesis 2), results of these models suggest that not only are moral stereotypes serving as shortcuts in candidate evaluation for partisans, but that moral stereotypes are at least as effectives as shortcuts as salient policy positions. This finding has important implications for future research, and for politician's advertising tactics. It might would be wise for a politician to, for example, not take any substantive policy positions in an ad at all, as a moral frame could accomplish the same goal without the potential for having to change a well-known policy position right before an election (which is a political risk). Future research should seek to replicate these findings in a larger and more diverse sample.

5.4 Identification with Party and Use of the Stereotype

In order to test whether strength of identification with political party impacts how likely voters are to use the moral partisan stereotype as a shortcut in candidate evaluation, two second order models for each partisan subsample were specified. The second order model contains IDPG and IDPG*Condition terms. According to the theory posed here, we should expect to observe IDPG influencing the likelihood a voter in a given condition uses a partisan stereotype as a shortcut in candidate evaluation (Hypothesis 4). Both models are as follows:

$$Support = \beta_0 \, Democratic \; Control + \beta_1 \, Democratic \; Experimental + \beta_2 \, Republican \; Control + \beta_3 \, Republican$$
$$Experimental + \beta_4 IDPG + \beta_5 \, IDPG*Democratic \; Experimental + \beta_6 \, IDPG*Republican \; Experimental + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

Once again, due to the strong relationship between experimental condition and IDPG in the Republican subsample, the model offers little more information than a clue that the two variables are correlated. Results of the model in the Republican subsample are presented in Table 5 below. Note how the correlation between condition and IDPG has skewed the baseline coefficient in comparison to the previous model.

For Democrats, the model is slightly more insightful. Intercept at baseline remains rather constant in comparison to the first order model. Coefficients and the model as a whole also remain significant in the Democratic subsample with the addition of IDPG and IDPG*Condition terms. This means that even after the variation in support that the IDPG and IDPG*Condition explains, condition alone still explains a significant among of the variation in support. The coefficients remain as hypothesized, but the additional terms do not approach statistical or substantive significance, again suggesting that identification with party as a social group has little bearing on partisans' use of the moral stereotype as a judgmental heuristic. Results of Model 4 (equation 4) in the Democratic subsample are presented in Table 5 below.

In conclusion, statistical analyses provide evidence in support of the theory that voters have moral stereotypes. However, there is no evidence to suggest that strength of partisan identity influences whether voters use a moral stereotype to assign a party label to a candidate. Likewise, there is evidence to suggest that votes do use moral stereotypes as shortcuts in candidate evaluation. When strength of identification is brought into the model, there is no evidence to suggest that strength of identification is related is related to likelihood of using a moral stereotype as a shortcut in decision making. As such, the theory and hypotheses proposed here are only partially supported by the evidence.

Table 5: IDPG*Condition Interaction on Support

Variable	Model 4: Republicans (n=38)	Model 4: Democrats (n=103)
Baseline	.324	3.810
	(1.405)	(.620)
Democratic Experimental	2.796	-4.27
	(1.819)	(.891)
Republican Control	.753	-2.310*
	(1.819)	(.949)
Republican Experimental	2.745	-1.767*
	(2.327)	(.834)
IDPG	.033	-.023
	(.030)	(.016)
IDPG*Democratic Experimental	-.055	.006
	(.0450)	(.023)
IDPG*Republican Control	.0004	.032
	(.043)	(.025)
IDPG*Republican Experimental	.042	.016
	(.055)	(.022)

Table 5: Table 5 displays the results of model 4 (coefficients followed by standard errors in parentheses) in both the Republican and Democratic subsamples. In the Republican subsample, the baseline coefficient is heavily skewed downward from the first order model due to the strong variation in IDPG between experimental condition. This is likely due to the small size of the Republican subsample resulting in unequal distribution of IDPG scores between conditions. Because of this, the Republican model provides little insight other than a clue that IDPG and condition are related in this subsample. The Democratic model provides more insight. The first order model coefficients remain as hypothesized with Democrats less likely to support the candidate in the Republican conditions. The second order coefficients are all substantively and statistically insignificant, indicating that their inclusion in the model is not warranted, and that they do little to explain which voters are likely to support the candidate in various conditions. Taken together, the results of this analysis provide evidence against Hypothesis 4. Note that * indicates significance at $p < .05$

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study establishes that moral partisan stereotypes exist and are applied by partisan voters. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the stereotype is used by partisans as a shortcut in candidate evaluation. However, I failed to find evidence that strong partisans are more motivated to perceive an ambiguous candidate as a fellow partisan than weak partisans.

In line with hypotheses, when subjects in the Democratic subsample were asked to rate whether the political ad, they viewed gave them a good idea of a candidate's political platform, they were no less likely to agree in the experimental

conditions than in the policy control conditions. This suggests that in Democrats, moral partisan stereotypes exist and are used to impute other characteristics of an ambiguous candidate. Though subjects in the Republican subsample were still not significantly less likely to disagree that morally framed ads gave them a good idea of a candidate's political platform, coefficients appeared to be rather large taking into consideration the five-point scale used to evaluate agreement with the statement. This suggests that perhaps, Republicans are less likely to hold moral partisan stereotypes than democrats. However, no definite conclusion can be drawn on this front due to the small size, and unusual characteristics of the Republican subsample, in addition to the nature of the analyses conducted underscoring the need for replication of this study and suggesting a possible avenue for future research.

When subjects were asked to rate their likelihood of supporting the candidate in an election, a similar pattern emerged. Both Democrats and Republicans were significantly more likely to support the candidate depicted in their in-party's conditions. This means that regardless of whether the ad was framed in substantive policy or morality it was effective at influencing partisans to vote for the candidate. This is consistent with the hypothesized relationship. In addition, this finding has important implications for campaign strategy. By purchasing an ad framed in in-party morality, a politician can gain support from voters without taking any kind of substantive policy position that they may need to change as election day nears. If a politician has never taken a stance on an issue, they cannot be accused of flip flopping, something that is strongly disliked by voters. Interestingly, in the Republican subsample, subjects were significantly more likely to support the candidate in the experimental ad compared to baseline, but not the candidate in the control ad, suggesting that morally framed ads could be a particularly wise investment for Republican candidates.

These findings underscore the need for further research into the question of interest. As the sample utilized in this experiment is homogeneous, and recruited from a small liberal arts college, additional studies are needed to verify the external validity and generalizability of findings. Furthermore, experimental social psychology is currently experiencing a replication crisis due in part to small sample sizes. My Republican subsample was especially small and skewed (due in part to the left leaning political orientation of the campus where data collection took place). Future research projects investigating this phenomenon, or attempting to replicate the results presented here, should be sure to recruit more Republican participants.

An interesting research question that organically arose from the analysis, is the question of whether external political stimuli can influence social identification with political party as captured by the IDPG. In the Republican subsample, IDPG clearly varied (by more than a standard deviation) depending on subjects' experimental condition. To the author's knowledge, previous work in political psychology has yet to investigate this question of interest, as it is possible this phenomenon is a result of the manipulation, while also not unlikely it was observed by chance due to the incredibly small size of the Republican subsample.

7. Acknowledgements

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