Reconsidering Moral Issues in Politics

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Political scientists commonly distinguish issues that are moral from ones that are not. The distinction is taken to be important for understanding persuadability, the stability of opinions, and issue salience, among other phenomena, but there are inconsistencies in how scholars have conceived it. Drawing insights from psychology, I suggest that it is fruitful to think about moral conviction as a dimension of attitude strength. Using three data sources, I examine how much this perspective contributes to our understanding of politics. I find evidence that moral conviction shapes political opinions and action in surprising ways: it varies across issues, but also within them, including issues usually considered not to be moral. It contributes to participatory zeal, but moral conviction may also be related to political extremism and hostility. The findings point to much promise in a microlevel understanding of the role of morality in politics.

Issues are a driving force in politics. How citizens feel—and how strongly they feel—about specific policies organizes their thinking about candidates and parties, galvanizes interest groups to action, and causes political coalitions to splinter and churn (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Elites' decisions about which issues to emphasize, versus downplay, can make or break their electoral fortunes (Riker 1988; Schattschneider 1960). Clearly a developed understanding of issues and how they influence citizen behavior is central to understanding politics more generally.[1]

An extensive literature surrounds the idea that there is a distinction to be drawn between moral versus nonmoral issues (Mooney 2001b; Tatalovich and Daynes 2011b, for book-length treatments). There is an intuition that this distinction would matter in a host of ways. Perhaps attitudes on moral issues are especially based on values and therefore are detached from economic interests (Frank 2005; Tatalovich, Smith and Bobic 1994) and immune to suasion from facts and reason (Dye 1984). Perhaps politicians can take a stand on moral issues without committing to spend money, making them more conducive to position-taking (Meier 2001). Perhaps moral issues are persistent and easy to understand, making them a crucial driver of party realignment (Adams 1997; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Layman and Carsey 2002). Perhaps moral issues are particularly salient, making the extent to which they are focal highly determinative of voter turnout (Grummel 2008; Haider-Markel 1998).

These hypotheses face an obstacle. As others have noted, typologizing issues is not as easy as it might seem at first blush (Greenberg et al. 1977), and deciding which issues are moral is no exception (Smith 2002). Is morality intrinsic to particular issues? Is it instead a function of the strategies that issue advocates use? Or are moral issues the ones that evoke certain characteristic responses from citizens? Each of these possibilities changes what counts as a moral issue and suggests different hypotheses when it comes to broader effects.

Recent work in psychology suggests there may be unrealized promise in understanding morality as a characteristic psychological response. As I review below, substantial work converges on the idea that moral conviction—perceiving a connection to one's sense of right and wrong—can be understood as a property attached to some attitudes and not others. Morally convicted attitudes are special because they seem to engage a distinctive mode of processing: they powerfully arouse certain negative emotions, engender hostile opinions, and inspire punitive action.

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These patterns have clear political significance, but they are little explored.

This article seeks to advance understanding of how moral conviction unfolds in citizen politics. Relying on a mixture of nationally representative and convenience samples, I uncover considerable evidence that moral conviction is indeed an important force that guides citizen behavior. Study 1, which relies on two convenience samples, measures moral conviction as it emerges on a number of contemporary political issues. I directly compare moral conviction to more familiar dimensions of attitudes strength (cf. Petty and Krosnick 1995) in terms of their relationship to specific emotions. Moral conviction appears powerfully to evoke certain negative emotions toward political disagreement, perhaps more powerfully than any other attitude characteristic. Furthermore, where past work mostly looks for moral conviction on issues that are putatively moral (e.g., abortion, capital punishment, drug decriminalization; Skitka, Bauman, and Sargis 2005), I test the idea that citizens might have morally convicted attitudes even concerning putatively nonmoral issues. Indeed, I find evidence that some citizens perceive even distinctly economic issues such as labor relations laws and Social Security reform in characteristically moral ways. In short, morality appears to be very much in the eye of the beholder and a more far-reaching force than often assumed.

Study 2, which employs a nationally representative sample, replicates the main finding from Study 1, showing that moralization arises in some degree on an array of economic and noneconomic issues. This study also highlights broader consequences of a propensity to moralize political issues. Consistent with a link between moral conviction and punitive emotions, moralization appears to be an important force undergirding political activism, but also antagonism.

Moral Issues in Politics

In 1972, Theodore Lowi argued that the kind of politics that surrounds a public policy depends on the kind of coercion—all policies, he argued, are in some way coercive—it entails. Coercion can be applied either immediately or remotely and either to individuals or to their environment. The result was an elegant and durable two-by-two classification scheme that generates novel predictions about how political players will act (Lowi 1972).

It was not long before other researchers objected that Lowi's scheme, tidy though it is, left something out. T. Alexander Smith, attempting to extend Lowi's framework outside the U.S. case, noted several instances of "emotive-symbolic" issues—ending the death penalty in Great Britain, deciding what symbols would be incorporated into the Canadian flag—that Lowi's scheme appeared not to account for. Emotive-symbolic issues tended to be intensely felt and evoke interest from wide swaths of the population, even though they did not distribute material goods (Smith 1975). Lowi subsequently acknowledged the need to adapt his framework to account for these issues (Lowi 2011). There is now a cottage industry of scholarly efforts suggesting that so-called moral issues merit particular attention (see Mooney 2001a and Tatalovich and Daynes 2011b for overviews). They have been argued to play a special role in candidate preference (Abramowitz 1995), turnout (Biggers 2011; Grummel 2008; Meier 1994), interest-group mobilization (Haider-Markel and Meier 1996; Mooney and Lee 2000), emotional arousal (Abramowitz 1995; Biggers 2011; Layman 2001), the tendency to hold representatives accountable (Page and Shapiro 1983, 182; Tavits 2007), and realignment (Adams 1997; Carmines and Stimson 1980, 80).

Despite abundant attempts to employ a distinction between moral and nonmoral issues, there is not a settled understanding of what the distinction is, as various efforts have defined moral issues in very different ways. Mooney and Schuldt, for instance, emphasize the politics that surround an issue, writing that moral issues are ones where "at least one advocacy coalition involved in the debate defines the issue as threatening one of its core values, its first principles" (Mooney 2001a, 4; see also Mooney and Schuldt 2008, 201). Similarly, Haider-Markel and Meier define morality policies as those where "at least one advocacy coalition . . . portray[s] the issue as one of morality or sin and use[s] moral arguments in its policy advocacy" (1996, 333). A second approach defines the moral sphere not in terms of political strategy, but citizen psychology. Thus, for instance, Biggers suggests that moral issues elicit attitudes "based on core values rooted within an [sic] citizen's system of beliefs and primary identity, especially religion, which for many serves as the basis of their most fundamental values" (Biggers 2011, 8, citations omitted; see also Glick and Hutchinson 2001). A third approach suggests that morality is intrinsic to particular issues, defined by their essential characteristics. In this vein, Studlar argues that moral issues are nontechnical and easy to understand (Studlar 2001, 39) while Engeli, Green-Pedersem, and Larsen write that "the defining aspect of morality issues. . . [is] being about

fundamental decisions related to death, marriage and reproduction" (2012a, 24; see also Tavits 2007).

Despite the different approaches to definition, there is one clear point of convergence. There is a consensus, often made explicit, that economic issues are not moral (Abramowitz 1995; Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen 2012a, 26; Frank 2005; Laver and Garry 2000; Layman 2001; Mooney and Lee 1995; Smith 1975, 90; Studlar 2001, 38; Tatalovich and Daynes 2011a, xxxiii; Tavits 2007, 153). Thus, it would not be controversial to suggest that, while abortion, the death penalty, physician-assisted suicide, and same-sex marriage are at least candidate moral issues, distributive issues like the budget, taxation, and Social Security reform are quintessential nonmoral issues.

This exclusion of economic issues is in a way puzzling. As noted above, one definitional approach asks whether issue advocates use moral frames in their appeals, and appeals on economic issues often do. For example, in February of 2011, the progressive Christian group Sojourners responded to congressional budget wrangling with an outreach campaign that had the slogan, "What would Jesus cut?" (Gilgoff 2011). Shortly thereafter, Arthur Brooks, President of the American Enterprise Institute, praised Representative Paul Ryan's budget plan by saying that budgets are "moral documents" (Keohane 2011). Then, in September of 2011, a video of Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren went viral on the Internet in which she excoriated opponents of progressive taxation for violating "the underlying social contract" (New York Times 2011). Laws regulating union activity have complex economic implications but are often discussed with intuitive deontological[2] language, such as an asserted "right to collectively bargain" or "right to work."

The exclusion of economic issues is also puzzling under a definition of morality policy that emphasizes citizen psychology. The distinction between economic and noneconomic issues is socially constructed; it is not a "natural kind" with analogs in human evolutionary history. Thus, while it seems sensible (for example) to suggest that the brain would use a distinctive processing style in evaluating intentional versus nonintentional actions (Petersen 2010; Petersen et al. 2012), a sharp psychological distinction between economic and noneconomic issues seems less likely.

That existing delineations of the moral domain are murky can be seen in how scholars have classified specific issues. Laver and Garry (2000) exclude both the environment and social-welfare programs from their set of moral issues. Tavits (2007), by way of contrast, considers both welfare-state expansion and environmental protection to be in the social, not the economic, domain. Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) exclude opinions about the environment from their set of moral issues, but they include feelings toward the women's movement and questions about child-rearing values (which were developed to measure respondents' authoritarian personality, see Stenner 2005). Moral issues are supposed to be easy (Studlar 2001), but Carmines and Stimson (1989) point to the war in Vietnam as an exemplar hard issue, although it seems clear that some of the war's opponents saw their views as having a moral basis.

Moral Conviction

The idea that attitudes are multidimensional is intuitive and has long played a role in thinking about politics. In his *Preface to Democratic Theory*, for instance, Dahl (1956, chap. 4) argues that political theorists need to consider two properties of an attitude separately: its content, and the intensity with which it is held. In the intervening years, psychologists have pressed much farther, finding attitudes to vary in the extent to which they are extreme, important, elaborated, accessible, conscious, central, certain, crystallized, steadfast, emotionally laden, conscious, and several other properties (see Abelson 1988; and Petty and Krosnick 1995 for helpful overviews).

Recent years have seen the accumulation of a considerable evidence that attitudes meaningfully differ in terms of whether they are held with moral conviction (Atran, Axelrod, and Davis 2007; Baron and Spranca 1997; Bennis, Medin, and Bartels 2010; Ditto, Pizarro, and Tannenbaum 2009; Skitka, Bauman, and Sargis 2005; Tetlock 2003). Skitka, developing propositions from Turiel (e.g., 1983), defines morally convicted attitudes according to three characteristics: First, they are perceived as universal—as "absolutes, or universal standards of truth that others should also share" (2010, 269).[3] Second, they are experienced as objective—"as if they were readily observable, objective properties of situations, or as facts about the world" (269). Third, they are independent of external authority (2010, 269).

Taken together, these three characteristics identify a very distinctive set of attitudes. It becomes clear that moral convictions are not simply intense attitudes, since

[2]"Deontology" refers to intrinsic, *prima facie*, notions of right and wrong.

[3]Tetlock's definition of sacred values is very similar (2003, 320).

many intense attitudes are not perceived as universal. To see this, compare a nonmoral preference—"I don't like Brussels sprouts"—to one that, for many people, is held with moral conviction—"I don't like to clean my bathroom with an American flag." A dislike of Brussels sprouts can be arbitrarily intense, but unlike cleaning a bathroom with a patriotic symbol, it is strange to imagine someone *else's* eating Brussels sprouts inspiring anger or contempt. The external-authority criterion ensures that moral convictions are not the same as norms or social conventions. Consider that a teacher can suspend a convention ("Don't wear pajamas to school") but not a moral mandate ("Don't hit your classmate") (cf. Smetana 1983).

It might be objected that to claim that some attitudes are held with moral conviction is inconsistent with an estimable line of research extending back to Converse's famous (1964) essay, which convincingly establishes that most citizens lack ideological sophistication. But moral-conviction theory does not require citizens to derive attitudes through logical reasoning or from a guiding belief system. It sees such reasoning as possible but rare (Haidt 2003a). Where people articulate a systematic deduction of opinions from principles, moral-conviction theory would be wary that they are rationalizing (cf. Nisbett and Wilson 1977), since moral-conviction theory arose as a critique of earlier research (e.g. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer 1983) that held a rationalist view of moral psychology. Instead, the claim is only that the *perception* that an attitude has a moral basis, whether the perception comes from reasoning or (more likely) some aspect of socialization, matters. One of the research program's central objectives is to reconcile the apparent scarcity of rationalist thinking with the powerful force that moral judgments seem to have in social life. As Haidt states the idea, people can "know that something is wrong without knowing why" (2001, 814).[4]

Psychologists have made progress outlining an evolutionary basis for moral conviction. There is reason to believe that an ability to internalize and enforce social rules would have increased the reproductive fitness of our evolutionary ancestors (Sinnott-Armstrong 2007; Tooby and Cosmides 2010). Opinions differ on whether the tendency is best understood through the lens of individual-level (DeScioli and Kurzban 2013) or multilevel selection (Haidt 2012; Wilson and Wilson 2008), but in either case, deontological ethics seem to have a material basis in the brain (e.g. Berns et al. 2012; Greene 2007).

The deontological rules that the brain encodes do not necessarily coincide with specific topics, such as harm, fairness, or religion. Consider taboos against eating certain kinds of meat, prohibitions against dancing, or rules against harmless sexual conduct that have existed in various places (DeScioli and Kurzban 2009, for an excellent discussion). Rozin (1999) argues that cigarette smoking, once entirely mundane, has now become moralized in the United States, motivating visceral disgust and punitive sentiments. Returning to the discussion above, these realizations give additional reason to suspect that characteristically moral thinking could emerge even on economic issues.

The potential political significance of moral conviction comes from its ability to evoke "other-condemning" emotions and action tendencies that can drive citizens apart (Haidt 2003b, especially 855–59; see also DeScioli and Kurzban 2009). There are many striking examples. In a series of experiments, Tetlock and colleagues find violations of sacred values cause moral outrage, "harsh character attributions to those who endorse the proscribed thoughts and even to those who do not endorse, but do tolerate this way of thinking in others" (Tetlock et al. 2000, 853-854; see also Tetlock 2003). Similarly, Mullen and Skitka (2005) present subjects with vignettes about violations of morally convicted political opinions and find conviction to moderate the arousal of anger (see also Skitka and Wisneski 2011). Studying political conflicts, such as those in the Middle East, Atran and colleagues find negotiations take on peculiar properties when they involve sacred values: monetary compensation (counterintuitively) *increases* violent opposition to compromise (Atran and Axelrod 2008; Ginges et al. 2007). Tetlock and colleagues (2000) find that merely contemplating counterfactuals that present an affront to sacred values inspires a desire to engage in moral cleansing.

There are open questions concerning how moral-conviction theory bears on mass politics. Is the citizenry consistent in terms of which issues it moralizes, or is there considerable variance even within particular issues? Is moral conviction limited to specific issues—such as noneconomic ones—or can it emerge on both economic and noneconomic issues? Does moral conviction enhance our understanding of political opinions above and beyond more familiar attitude characteristics, such as importance or personal relevance? Do citizens vary in terms of their propensity to moralize, and if so, with what effect? The studies below engage each of these questions.

[4]An extensive and estimable vein of thought in ethical philosophy views morality or goodness as a conceptual primitive. It emerges particularly in the writings of Hume ([1739] 1888) and Moore ([1903] 1922).

Study 1: Moral Conviction and Emotions

Study 1 examines where moral conviction arises. It also directly compares moral conviction to other measures of attitude strength in terms of their ability to arouse specific emotions. Considerable work now highlights how specific emotions elicit politically relevant action patterns (e.g., Neuman et al. 2007), making them of interest in their own right. However, Study 2 moves to more direct measures of political involvement.

There are three hypotheses. The first two concern where moral conviction will be found and are meant to contrast with the idea that some issues are intrinsically moral.

H1: Moral conviction will vary not only across, but also within, particular issues.

H2: Moral conviction will emerge in some considerable degree on both economic and noneconomic issues.

The third hypothesis is motivated by the finding (discussed above) that violations of morally convicted attitudes evoke other-condemning feelings.

H3: Moral conviction will be associated with the arousal of negative emotions, although the arousal might be limited to emotions with punitive overtones.

Data and measures. Data come from two complementary samples. First, a researcher visited discussion sections at a large research university and invited undergraduate participants in political science classes to complete a questionnaire as part of an in-class activity (N = 217).[5] Second, I recruited a larger sample (N = 472 Americans) using Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) crowdsourcing service. While also not representative of the general population, it is unrepresentative in different ways—see the online appendix (§1) for sample characteristics—and has other attractive properties.[6]

The questionnaire was designed to capture several dimensions of attitude strength with respect to several different political opinions. After questions on demographics and partisanship—all question wordings appear in the online appendix, §2—subjects were asked questions about five political issues: collective bargaining rights, Social Security reform, same-sex marriage, stem cell research, and the deployment of American troops in Afghanistan. These issues were chosen to present a mixture of putatively moral and nonmoral issues and were presented in a random order.

For each issue, the questionnaire measured extremity, importance, and personal relevance of subjects' opinions. Extremity, "the extent to which an attitude deviates from neutrality" (Krosnick and Petty 1995, 6) was measured as follows. First, respondents were presented with policy options adapted from Gallup public opinion questions. Next, they were asked which policy course they preferred, and to what degree. For instance, for the Social Security topic, subjects were asked, "How about you? Would you prefer to see taxes raised to preserve benefits at the current level, or would you prefer to cut benefits so taxes don't have to go up?" Responses were placed on a 7-point scale that included a neutral point. This scale was then folded to construct a 4-point scale of issue extremity. Importance, "the extent to which an individual cares deeply about and is personally invested in an attitude" (Krosnick et al. 1993, 1132) was measured, as is standard, with the question, "How important is this issue to you personally?" Personal relevance, the extent to which an attitude is "closely connected to . . . important personal goals, desire, and wishes" (Krosnick and Petty 1995, 7) was measured with the question, "How much does the outcome of this issue directly affect you?" (cf. Wegener et al. 1995, 471)

Each issue also measured moral conviction using an approach that has been validated and used in many studies (Skitka 2010, for a review). The approach seeks to tap the visceral recognition that an attitude is, in the eye of its holder, a moral mandate. Thus, subjects in the student sample were asked to what extent their opinion is "a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions," "deeply connected to your fundamental beliefs about right and wrong," and "based on a moral principle."[7] Response options were on a 5-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much." Given results suggesting that moral conviction could be measured adequately with fewer items, the third question was dropped for the MTurk questionnaire.[8]

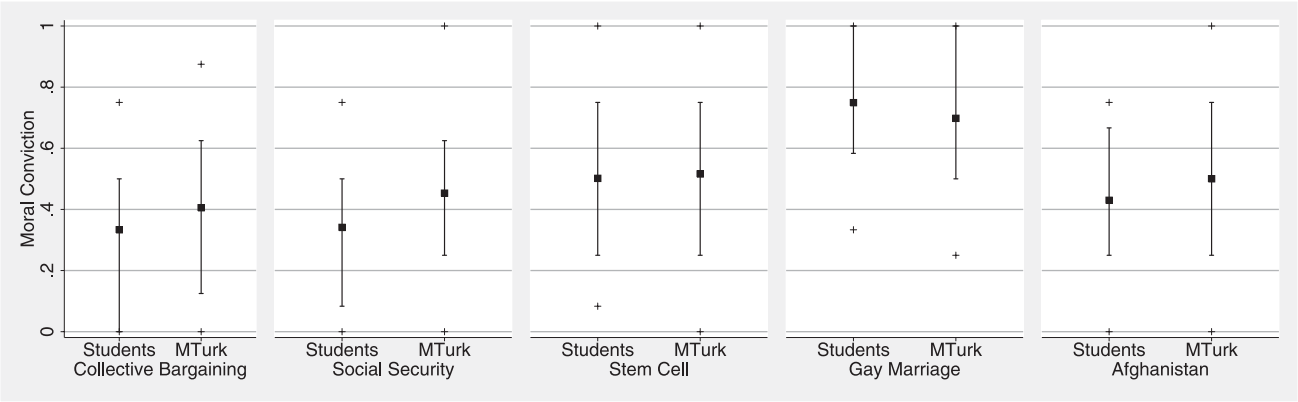
[5]The sample is not nationally representative, but its characteristics are, in a way, an asset: age, education, income, geography, and variables correlated with them are held constant by the design.

[6]Evidence of Mechanical Turk's usefulness for research continues to mount (Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz 2012; Buhrmeister, Kwang, and Gosling 2011). Moreover, researchers continue to develop tools to address some of its liabilities (Pe'er et al. 2012). In the present study, I employ an attention check that ensure subjects are cognitively engaged in the study, as well as an html script that ensures any particular subject can only appear in the sample once.

[7]As noted above, much research suggests that moral conviction is intuitive and visceral, which precludes the use of open-ended responses or questions that ask respondents to identify specific reasons for an opinion (Skitka and Bauman 2008, 36, for a discussion).

[8]Cronbach's α ranges from .90 to .93 in the student sample, .85 to .92 in the MTurk sample.

FIGURE 1 Distribution of Moral-Conviction Variable



Note: Distribution of moral conviction measure (scaled 0–1) for each issue presented to the student and MTurk samples. Squares indicate means. Bars span the middle 50% of responses. Plus signs span the middle 80% of responses.

Later in the questionnaire, as dependent measures, subjects were asked to report how well each of the following phrases describe their feelings toward "people who disagree with you about this issue": "I like them"; "I dislike them"; "Angry at them"; "Disgusted with them"; "Afraid of them"; "Respect for them"; "Frustration with them"; "Sad about them"; and "Appreciative of them". The first two phrases were designed to capture general affect, while the rest were included to tap specific, discrete emotions.

Results. Figure 1 graphically shows the distribution of the moral-conviction measure for both samples and across all five issues. To give a sense of dispersion, bars indicate the range of the middle 50% of responses, while plus signs span the middle 80%. It is immediately clear that, while some issues exhibit considerably more moral conviction than others—the means for the same-sex marriage issue are .75 (students) and .70 (MTurk) compared to only .33 and .41 for collective bargaining—all issues exhibit a lot of moral conviction among at least some respondents. Indeed, as the figure shows, every issue evokes a response above .7 from at least 20% of respondents. At the same time, this is not mere acquiescence, since similar proportions expressly deny that their attitudes stem from moral conviction by placing themselves at the very bottom of the scale.

A separate question is whether reports of moral conviction are a mere proxy for other aspects of attitude strength. They appear not to be. Correlations with the other measures of attitude strength, all of which are reported in the online appendix (§3), are only moderate: generally below .4 and rarely above .5. A principal-factors analysis finds the moral-conviction questions always load heavily on the same factor (loadings always above .77) and barely at all on secondary factors (never above .10). Other measures of attitude strength do not load heavily on the moral-conviction factor (loadings generally below .20 and never above .37).[9] Morally convicted attitudes are more likely to be important, relevant, and extreme, but moral conviction nonetheless seems to capture a distinct aspect of an attitude. These results amount to support for Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

Moral conviction appears to emerge distinctly with respect to political issues, but does it moderate how citizens engage those issues? To answer this question, I compare, by ordinary least squares (OLS), the distinct contributions of each dimension of attitude strength to the arousal of emotions. Specifically, I estimate a series of models specified as

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Emotion} = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 \text{extremity} + \beta_2 \text{importance} \\ &+ \beta_3 \text{relevance} + \beta_4 \text{moral convition} + \epsilon,\end{aligned}$$

where all variables are scaled 0–1. Since there are nine emotions for each of five issues, I estimate 45 models for each of the two samples. Full results appear in the online appendix (§5). Table 1, however, summarizes the results as concern the moral-conviction measure. It reports the coefficient on moral conviction (β_4) for four negative emotions (general negative affect, anger, disgust, and fear) as well as two positive ones (respect and appreciation).

The results suggest that perceiving an issue to be moral powerfully and independently predicts specific feelings toward issue opponents. For general negative

[9]Full results of the factor analysis appear in the online appendix (§4).

Table 1 Moral Conviction Powerfully Predicts Punitive Feelings Toward Issue Opponents

	Collective Bargaining		Social Security		Same-Sex Marriage		Stem Cell		Afghanistan		Pooled	
	Students	*MTurk*	*Students*	*MTurk*	*Students*	*MTurk*	*Students*	*MTurk*	*Students*	*MTurk*	*Students*	*MTurk*
Negative affect	0.283**[a]	0.251**[a]	0.169**[a]	0.183**[a]	0.317**[a]	0.191**[a]	0.209**[a]	0.094*[a]	0.190**[a]	0.125*	0.159**[a]	0.146**[a]
	(0.064)	(0.056)	(0.057)	(0.050)	(0.085)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.041)	(0.060)	(0.050)	(0.034)	(0.024)
Anger	0.237**[a]	0.286**[a]	0.170**[a]	0.227**[a]	0.302**[a]	0.166**	0.218**[a]	0.158**[a]	0.212**[a]	0.223**[a]	0.160**[a]	0.170**[a]
	(0.060)	(0.053)	(0.053)	(0.048)	(0.090)	(0.053)	(0.059)	(0.041)	(0.057)	(0.046)	(0.032)	(0.023)
Disgust	0.235**[a]	0.314**[a]	0.120*[a]	0.225**[a]	0.331**[a]	0.270**[a]	0.211**[a]	0.201**[a]	0.196**[a]	0.239**[a]	0.172**	0.209**[a]
	(0.058)	(0.051)	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.094)	(0.062)	(0.061)	(0.045)	(0.053)	(0.049)	(0.035)	(0.025)
Fear	0.072[a]	0.076	0.069[a]	0.133**[a]	0.113*[a]	0.037	0.046	0.045	0.069	0.133**[a]	0.020[a]	0.059**[a]
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.035)	(0.044)	(0.051)	(0.040)	(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.038)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Respect	0.171*[a]	-0.041	0.039	0.010	-0.114	-0.112*	-0.040[a]	-0.025	0.014	0.029	-0.063**[a]	-0.107**[a]
	(0.081)	(0.060)	(0.077)	(0.059)	(0.070)	(0.051)	(0.067)	(0.045)	(0.074)	(0.059)	(0.031)	(0.020)
Appreciation	0.134	-0.071	0.030	-0.052	-0.074	-0.081	-0.016	-0.001	0.053	0.034	-0.046	-0.077**[a]
	(0.075)	(0.060)	(0.066)	(0.061)	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.060)	(0.042)	(0.070)	(0.057)	(0.028)	(0.018)

Note: Each cell entry is from a separate ordinary least squares (OLS) model in which the dependent variable on the left (e.g., anger) is regressed on issue-specific measures of opinion extremity, importance, personal relevance, and moral conviction. (For simplicity, coefficients from variables other than moral conviction are not shown, but full models are available in the online appendix, §5.) For the pooled models, the attitude-strength relationships are estimated simultaneously across all issues in a fixed-effects model. (A fixed effect for each issue and for each respondent is included.) Heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in parentheses. All variables coded 0–1. A superscript *a* indicates that the coefficient on the moral-conviction measure is greater in magnitude than any other measure of attitude strength.
**$p < .01$ *$p < .05$, two-tailed test.

affect, anger, and disgust, the relationship is clearly significant and consistent across issues. Most striking, however, is how moral conviction compares to other indicators of attitude strength when it comes to predicting these three emotions. Superscript *a*s indicate that, for the model in question, $|\beta_4| > |\beta_{k\in\{1,2,3\}}|$ (i.e., that the moral-conviction relationship is estimated to be more powerful than any other). For these emotions, it is in every case except two, suggesting that the perception of morality is far more predictive than more familiar aspects of attitude strength, such as extremity.

And yet the consequences of moral conviction appear to be, in some respects, quite specific. It might have been the case that moral conviction arouses all negative emotions together. But the relationship with fear seems much weaker—perhaps one-third the magnitude. This result is consistent with findings pointing to distinct antecedents and consequences of fear, as compared to other negative emotions (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000) as well as the notion that moral disagreement is tightly connected to negative feelings in general, but to approach-related, punitive feelings in particular. It might also have been the case that, just as moral conviction foments anger and disgust, it dampens positive emotions. Looking at individual issues, the relationships here are, likewise, more tentative, only occasionally reaching statistical significance and sometimes having a sign contrary to the hypothesis.

The far-right section of Table 1 takes a step back to look at the big picture, combining results across issues. I partition out relationships specific to particular issues and individuals, estimating

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Emotion} = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 \text{extremity} + \beta_2 \text{importance} \\ &+ \beta_3 \text{relevance} + \beta_4 \text{moral conviction} \\ &+ \beta_{\{5,6,7,8\}} \text{issue fixed effects} \\ &+ \beta_{k\in\{9,10,\ldots,l\}} \text{respondent fixed effects} + \epsilon,\end{aligned}$$

where l is determined by the sample size. Looking across issues in this way, the moral-conviction measure remains a potent predictor of negative affect, anger, and disgust, both statistically and substantively. The coefficient magnitudes are such that, when it comes to these emotions, the perception that an issue is moral corresponds to movement across perhaps 15% or 20% of the dependent variable's theoretical range—a larger difference than simply expressing an extreme attitude on the issue. The results of the pooled model also suggest moral conviction does in fact evoke fear toward issue opponents, although to a much smaller degree than the other negative emotions. Moreover, it seems to dampen positive emotions, although again the relationship is perhaps half the magnitude as for anger and disgust.[10]

To summarize, Study 1 uncovers strong evidence that it is fruitful to think about moral conviction as an aspect of attitude strength that varies across issues but also within them. Moreover, moral conviction appears at least as central to arousing certain negative emotions as extremity, importance, and personal relevance. The findings shed light on who is likely to be motivated by particular issues, why people differ in how they process issues, and the conditions under which issues are likely to evoke animosity and hostility. Study 2 builds on these results by examining effects on the broader political system.

Study 2: Effects of Moral Conviction

Study 1 shows that moral conviction varies across attitudes. It could simultaneously be true that people vary in their *propensity* to moralize political attitudes. As Abelson states the idea, perhaps "conviction has some degree of generality across issues; in other words, characteristic level of conviction on a large range of issues is an individual difference variable" (1988, 270).

I focus on two hypotheses concerning the propensity to moralize. The first stems from the idea that people with many convictions are likely to feel anger and disgust toward political opponents—as exhibited in Study 1—more often.

> *H4*: Individuals with many convictions will be more one-sided in their political assessments, pairing greater affinity for political allies with greater animosity for political foes.

An additional hypothesis has two motivations. First, recent work highlights the motivational force of emotions. This work initially focused on enthusiasm as inducing participation (e.g., Brader 2005), but recent work finds that anger also carries motivational force (Ryan 2012b; Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009). Moreover, many studies identify punitive-action tendencies as characteristic of moral appraisals

[10]Perhaps my approach unfairly advantages the moral-conviction measure by using more questions to measure it than the other dimensions of attitude strength. Testing this possibility, I replicated Table 1, discarding all but one of the moral-conviction questions. No substantive results change. The online appendix (§6) also reports results from a test in which the moral-conviction measure is compared to a summary measure of the other aspects of attitude strength. It continues to perform well.

(DeScioli and Kurzban 2013, especially 477–78, for a review). To the extent citizens conceive political activities such as filling out a petition or attending a rally as a way to oppose moral violators, there is reason to believe that morally convicted people would be highly motivated to participate in politics. Thus,

> *H5*: Morally convicted individuals participate in politics more than nonmorally convicted people.

I also contrast my attitude-focused view of moral conviction with other perspectives. It has been argued that, stemming from authoritarian predispositions (Altemeyer 1996), adherence to the Protestant Work Ethic (Furnham 1984), or a focus on cultural issues (Frank 2005; Westen 2008), citizens on the right are more likely to moralize politics than those on the left. On the other hand, if an important form of moral conviction arises from species-typical cognitive mechanisms, as I suggest, it would be surprising indeed if it emerged in one ideological coalition and not the other, although it might be expressed differently.[11]

Data and measures. I draw data from three sources. The first two are the samples used in Study 1. Additionally, I use data from the 2012 American National Election Studies (ANES) Evaluations of Government and Society Study (EGSS), February, 2012 Survey. The latter was conducted over the Internet by Knowledge Networks (now GfK Research), which uses random-digit-dial and address-based sampling methods to construct a nationally representative sample. It has 1,314 respondents and includes a poststratification weight designed to generalize to the overall population. All analyses below are weighted to reflect the national population.

The EGSS includes innovative instrumentation designed to measure the propensity to moralize political issues. Respondents are shown a list of 10 issues: the budget deficit, the war in Afghanistan, education, health care, illegal immigration, the economic recession, abortion, same-sex marriage, the environment, and unemployment. They are asked to identify which of these issues they think is the most important one facing the United States today. Then, they are asked which is the least important. Next, they are asked one of Skitka's moral-conviction items (described above and used in Study 1) with respect to three of the 10 issues: the issue identified as most important, the one identified as least important, and a randomly selected third issue. In this way, it is possible to sketch an individual's distribution of moral conviction across issues that she finds both important and unimportant.[12] I construct a summary measure of an individual's propensity to moralize simply by taking the average of the moral-conviction responses across the three issues ($\alpha = .70$).

The student and MTurk samples described above permit construction of a similar propensity-to-moralize measure, since they measure moral conviction with respect to five heterogeneous issues that encompass putatively moral topics (stem cell research and same-sex marriage) as well as putatively nonmoral ones (Social Security reform, collective bargaining, and troops in Afghanistan). Again, I simply average the moral conviction responses across the five issues.[13]

Testing the hypotheses above also requires a measure of a "one-sided" view of politics. Thus, the student and MTurk instruments measured affect toward both the Republican and Democratic Parties on a 7-point scale. Using these questions and self-reports of partisanship, I construct a difference measure that is simply (InParty liking) – (OutParty liking). The EGSS does not include a measure of party affect, but it does gauge affect toward candidates who were prominent at the time: Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, and (since the GOP primary was not settled), Newt Gingrich. For the EGSS, I construct a comparable measure, which is $|\text{ObamaLiking} - max(\text{RomneyLiking}, \text{GingrichLiking})|$. As an additional test, I leverage questions on the EGSS that ask how much Democrats and (separately) Republicans were to blame for poor economic conditions of the past few years. On the idea that responses to this question reflect feelings toward the parties more than a disinterested evaluation, I also use a measure of blame directed at the out-party as a dependent measure.

The student and MTurk samples included nine standard questions asking subjects what political activities they participated in during the recent campaign (e.g., wearing a campaign button). Using these, I construct a scale of political participation. The EGSS has five similar questions, although they are split into a group of three that focus on prospective ("In the future . . .") participation and two that focus on retrospective ("During the past 12 months").

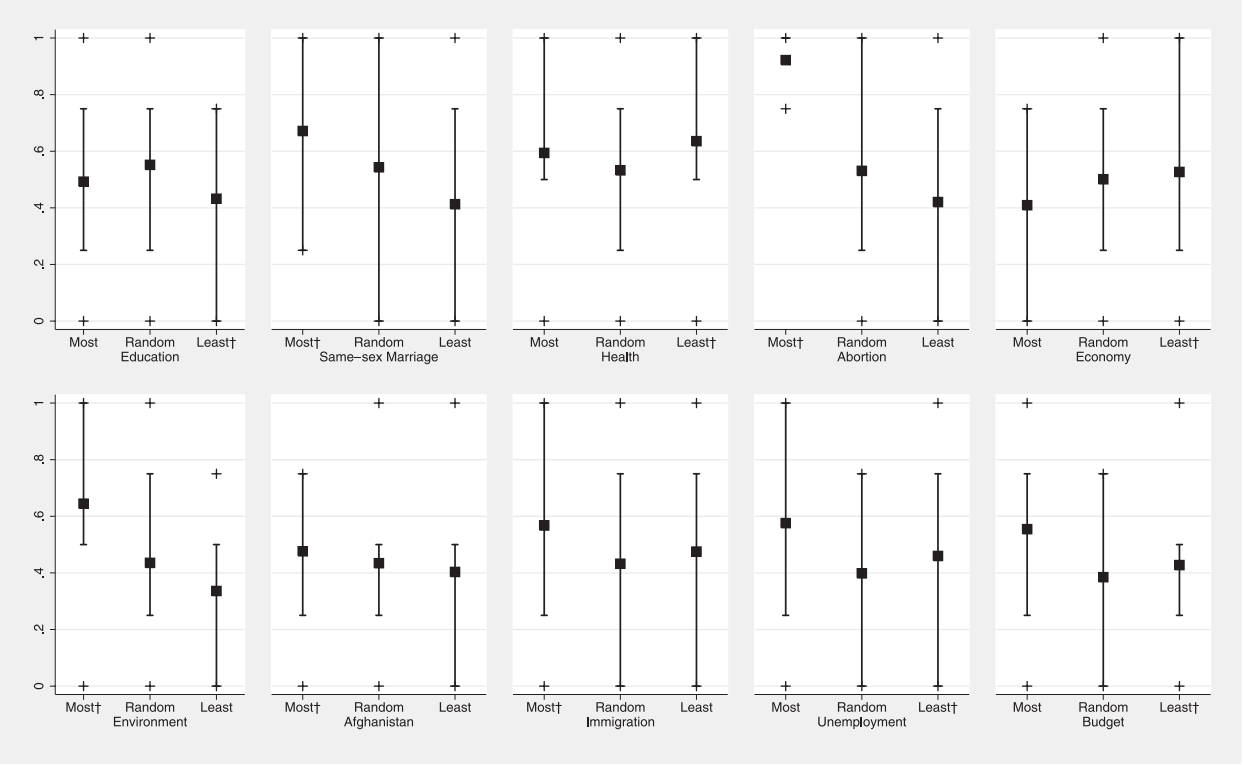
Results. Before turning attention to the propensity-to-moralize measure, I consider issue-specific responses from the new data source: the EGSS. Figure 2 is similar to Figure 1 in that it shows the mean, middle 50%, and 80% of responses for each issue. Given the different

[11]For a related discussion, see the "Equal Opportunity Motivator" hypothesis in Skitka and Bauman (2008).

[12]See Wisneski, Skitka, and Morgan (2011) and Morgan, Skitka, and Wisneski, (2010) for validation information on this approach.

[13]In the student sample, $\alpha = .65$. In the MTurk sample, $\alpha = .68$.

FIGURE 2 Moral Convictions Across Issues on EGSS

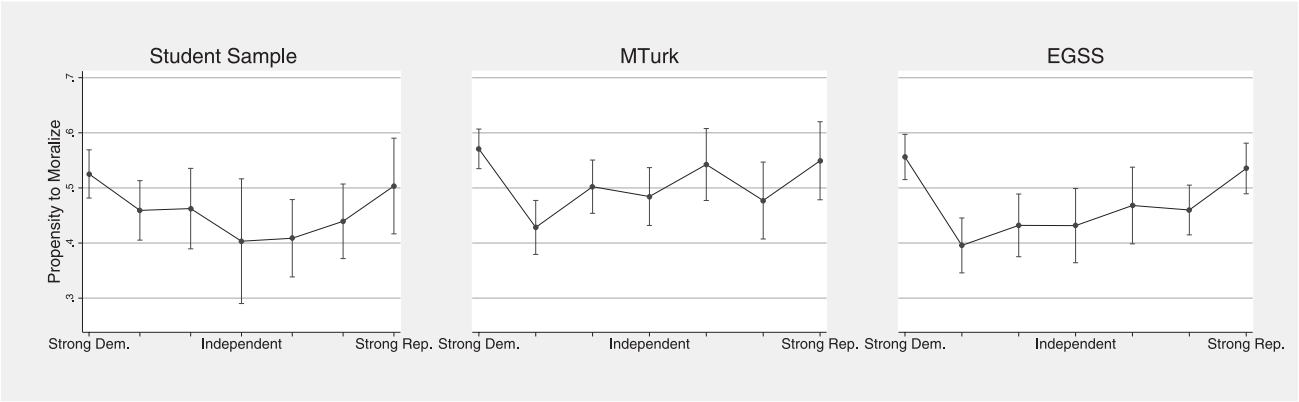


Note: Distribution of the moral conviction measure for each issue, broken down by whether respondents said the issue was the most important, the least important, or whether they said it was neither most nor least important but were randomly assigned to it. Squares indicate means. Bars span the middle 50% of responses. Plus signs span the middle 80% of responses. Issues are arrayed in descending order by the "Random" measure, giving a rough sense of which issues are most moralized. The number of respondents in a category ranges from 12 (Same-sex Marriage as most important) to 601 (Same-sex Marriage as least important). All randomly assigned measures have at least 82 responses. Daggers (†) appear next to categories that have fewer than fifty responses (e.g. the War in Afghanistan as the most important issue). There is no middle 50% bar for respondents who selected abortion as the most important issue because, of the 16 respondents who fit this description, 14 provided the highest possible response on the moral conviction measure.

structure of the EGSS question (see above), I additionally break down responses based on whether respondents said the issue was most important, least important, or whether she was randomly assigned to it. Because some configurations have too few respondents to draw firm conclusions—e.g., not many people indicate that abortion is the most important issue facing America—I indicate bins with fewer than 50 respondents with a dagger (†) next to the words ''most'' or ''least,'' as appropriate.

The EGSS lacks questions on emotions, so a full replication of Study 1 is not possible. Nevertheless, several substantive findings appear to replicate in this nationally representative sample. First, there is high variance in moral conviction even within particular issues. Quite often, the two plus signs land at opposite extremes of the scale, indicating that at least 20% of respondents picked the highest moral-conviction response at the same time that 20% picked the lowest one. Second, it can be seen visually that moral-conviction correlates only loosely with perceived importance. Within each issue, means generally descend as one reads from left to right, but only modestly and not consistently. (Across all issues, no correlation between dummies for saying an issue is either most or least important, and moral conviction is larger than $r = .28$.) Third, moral conviction is not limited to putatively moral issues. The figure arrays issues in descending order of moral conviction, based on the randomly assigned responses. As can be seen, by this standard, the quintessentially moral issues of same-sex marriage and abortion are high on the list, but education—not widely regarded as a moral issue—tops the list, and health care is perceived in more moral terms than abortion. Moreover, there is more variation within issues than between them; consider that, although the budget—the quintessential nonmoral issue—indeed ranks last in terms of moral conviction,

FIGURE 3 Moral Conviction and Partisanship



Note: Mean level of moral conviction (scaled 0–1) by party identification for each of the three data sources. A U-shaped relationship emerges in each case. Bars indicated 95% confidence intervals.

its mean is only .17 different from the most moral issue, on a 0–1 scale.

Next, I consider properties of the propensity-to-moralize measure. A full examination of what determines moral conviction is beyond my scope here. Nevertheless, it is worth a moment to note considerable variance (scaled 0–1, $M = .47$; SD = .29) and a roughly normal distribution (see online appendix, §7). Also, there are low correlations with being female (-.04), age (-.00), performance on a political-knowledge battery (.00), and of education (-.10), confirming that moral conviction is not a mere proxy for these more familiar measures. There is a notable relationship with religiosity, as measured by frequency of church attendance, but it explains less than 3% of the variance of the moral-conviction measure.[14]

There does appear to be a relationship with partisanship. Figure 3 shows the mean level of moral conviction for each level of partisanship and for each of the three available samples. Even given different sample characteristics and somewhat different instrumentation, a U-shaped pattern emerges in each case, with strong partisans exhibiting the highest levels of conviction, independents less so. I lack evidence speaking to whether the relationship is causal and, if so, which direction it runs, but firm evidence suggests that, whatever the effects of moral conviction, they will emerge mostly from partisan extremes.

The evidence in Figure 3 belies the notion, mentioned above, that moral feelings are the sole purview of the political right. Across all three samples, voters on both the left and right exhibit comparable levels of moral conviction. Indeed, strong Democrats are slightly higher than strong Republicans in all three samples. The right-centric traits mentioned above (e.g., authoritarianism) certainly carry their own significance, but whatever the effects of morality—as I define it here—are, they should come from both the left and the right.

Table 2 assesses the idea (H4) that morally convicted individuals are more one-sided in their view of politics. I examine how the propensity measure relates to what one might call a black-and-white or "Manichaean" view of politics, as captured by party and candidate "gap" measures. As described above, a high score on these measures reflects strong positive feelings toward one party (or candidate) paired with strong negative feelings toward its competitor. The EGSS analysis also examines determinants of blame directed at political opponents, as described above. Since partisanship is almost certainly related to both moral conviction and the dependent variables, I estimate relationships by OLS and include strength of Party ID as a control. On the idea that either liberals or conservatives might have a more one-sided view of politics, I also include ideology in the model, as well as available demographics.

As shown in Table 2, there is consistent evidence that the propensity to moralize engenders a one-sided view of politics. In the student sample, the relationship is directionally consistent with the hypothesis, but not significant ($p < .18$ by a two-tailed test).[15] It is highly significant in both other samples. Particularly striking

[14]Regressing (weighted OLS) moral conviction on church attendance, $\beta_{church} = .14$; SE = .037; $p < .01$.

[15]Additional analyses suggest that the insignificant result is more likely attributable to the smaller size of the student sample than to its special characteristics (e.g., very young): in the MTurk and EGSS samples, the moral conviction relationship does not significantly differ by age.

TABLE 2 Moral Conviction and Political Evaluations

	Student		*MTurk*		*EGSS*			
	Party Gap		Party Gap		Candidate Gap		Blame Attribution	
Propensity to moralize	0.138	0.125	0.267**	0.269**	0.118**	0.152**	0.104**	0.113**
	(0.102)	(0.102)	(0.071)	(0.072)	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.034)	(0.036)
Party identification strength	0.703**	0.715**	0.647**	0.642**	0.238**	0.193**	0.112**	0.116**
	(0.071)	(0.069)	(0.054)	(0.055)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.037)	(0.039)
Ideology (cons = 1)	-0.072	-0.029	-0.200**	-0.204**	-0.090*	-0.078	-0.049	-0.019
	(0.078)	(0.092)	(0.048)	(0.057)	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.033)	(0.037)
Age	–	–	0.093	0.091	0.187**	0.177**	0.205**	0.215**
			(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.047)	(0.050)	(0.044)	(0.048)
Female	0.072	0.073	0.016	0.014	-0.032	-0.037	-0.057**	-0.060**
	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.019)	(0.020)
Church attendance	–	-0.110	–	0.054	–	0.062	–	-0.018
	–	(0.083)	–	(0.072)	–	(0.036)	–	(0.035)
Education dummies	–	–	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included	Included
Constant	-0.105	-0.080	0.057	0.061	0.122**	0.118*	0.508**	0.517**
	(0.080)	(0.082)	(0.146)	(0.148)	(0.049)	(0.062)	(0.058)	(0.060)
R^2	0.377	0.385	0.402	0.402	0.157	0.148	0.079	0.085
N	199	199	352	346	1,233	1,055	1,092	945

Note: All models are ordinary least squares (OLS). (For the EGSS, weighted OLS.) Heteroskedasticity consistent (Student, MTurk) or design-appropriate (EGSS) standard errors in parentheses. All variables are coded 0–1. For the student sample, age, and education are essentially held constant by the sample characteristics.
*p < .05 **p < .01.

is the magnitude of the relationship. Going by the nationally representative sample, the impact of moral conviction seems to be at least half as strong as the impact of (notoriously dominant) PID strength. This evidence is highly consistent with Hypothesis 4.

Table 2 also assesses a possible competing hypothesis: that, especially given the instrumentation used to measure moral conviction (in particular, use of the word "moral"), the relationship between conviction and a one-sided view of politics arises spuriously out of religious commitment. If this were true, then controlling for religiosity should eliminate or at least attenuate the impact of moral conviction. As Table 2 shows, including the frequency of church attendance as a control, if anything, increases the impact of moral conviction. Moreover, religious commitment exhibits no relationship—except perhaps as mediated by moral conviction—to the dependent variables. This result is more evidence in favor of treating religiosity and moral conviction as separate constructs.

Table 3 turns attention to the conjecture (H5) that morally convicted individuals participate more in politics. Drawing from Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, chap. 12), I add the propensity measure to a standard model of political participation that accounts for participation-related resources (education, income, and feelings of efficacy) and interest in politics (self-reported following of politics and responses to political knowledge questions). I also include controls for age, gender, and given its putative relationship to morality, as well an established relationship to political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), frequency of church attendance as a measure of religiosity. I replicate the same model to the extent possible in the other two samples.[16]

Looking across samples, there is considerable evidence that moral conviction goes with campaign activity. The coefficient falls slightly short of standard significance thresholds in the model for retrospective participation ($p < .08$ by a two-tailed test), but it is highly significant in every other case. (For prospective participation in the EGSS, $p < .02$.) Once again, the magnitude of observed relationships is noteworthy. For the participation models, it is always larger than strength of party ID. This is strong evidence consistent with Hypothesis 5.

With cross-sectional data, one must take care not to overstate evidence for a causal relationship. The evidence above shows that moral conviction

[16]The student and MTurk samples do not contain income information, as I deemed the question too sensitive for my samples. (For students, it is not likely to vary much.) Length constraints prohibited administration of a political-knowledge battery.

TABLE 3 Moral Conviction Motivates Participation

	Student	*MTurk*	*EGSS*	
	Participation Scale	**Participation Scale**	**Participation Scale (retrospective)**	**Participation Scale (prospective)**
Propensity to moralize	0.432**	0.249**	0.068	0.058*
	(0.099)	(0.060)	(0.038)	(0.024)
Party identification strength	0.244**	0.102**	0.050	0.027
	(0.060)	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.024)
Age	–	-0.044	0.192**	-0.079**
	–	(0.052)	(0.048)	(0.039)
Female	0.017	-0.015	-0.037	-0.003
	(0.035)	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.015)
Income	–	–	-0.031	-0.002
	–	–	(0.045)	(0.044)
Church attendance	-0.113*	0.044	0.078*	0.099**
	(0.055)	(0.038)	(0.035)	(0.026)
Follow politics	–	–	0.010**	0.238**
			(0.033)	(0.024)
Political knowledge	–	–	0.028	-0.006
			(0.032)	(0.030)
Efficacy	–	–	0.094	0.185**
	–	–	(0.054)	(0.037)
Education dummies	–	Included	Included	Included
Constant	-0.038	-0.931**	-0.109	-0.041
	(0.058)	(0.126)	(0.043)	(0.033)
R^2	0.201	0.121	0.129	0.274
N	213	399	1,065	1,065

Note: All variables coded 0–1. Models estimated by ordinary least squares (OLS). Standard errors are heteroskedasticity- consistent (Student sample and MTurk) or based on design-derived poststratification weights (EGSS). For the student sample, age, and education are essentially held constant by the sample characteristics.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$.

predicts participation above and beyond more familiar predictors and is consistent with the notion that political involvement is one of its action tendencies. The converse possibility—that political involvement fosters moral conviction—has a weaker grounding in psychology, but it would also be a noteworthy finding.

Discussion and Conclusion

I return to the question of which issues are moral. The results herein suggest that answering this question requires careful reflection on why it is being asked. For instance, Meier (2001) suggests that one reason moral issues are noteworthy is that they tend to be symbolic; politicians can take a stand without committing to spend money. This idea would seem to exclude (for instance) health care, environmental regulation, and slavery reparations as moral issues, since all of them typically require commitment of financial resources. Mooney (2001a, 11) suggests that, since moral issues tend to be salient, they neutralize the technical expertise that typically advantages specialized interest groups. This saliency criterion would seem to include some issues not typically considered to be moral, such as right-to-work laws, affirmative action policies, and perhaps some foreign policies, since, at least in some episodes and for some people, they become highly salient. I hasten to emphasize that these are potentially fruitful taxonomies. But they are not directly engaging a separate question, worthy in its own right, "Which issues evoke characteristic psychological responses from voters?"

As concerns this last question, the results herein affirm the intuition that morality matters in politics while suggesting different ways to think about its role. Characteristically moral responses are more likely on some issues than others, but there is considerable variability even within particular issues, and some issues not widely regarded as moral are moralized for

some people. These observations may explain why some ostensibly nonmoral issues, such as collective–bargaining laws, American military involvement abroad, and redistributive taxation evoke a certain righteous fervor from at least some people, and what sorts of people will analyze issues through a consequentialist (cost/benefit) versus deontological (right/wrong) framework. Moreover, some individuals—strong partisans—seem more likely to moralize politics than others, which may, in part, explain why they have so much difficulty understanding or seeing anything positive about their opponents' views in some domains. Finally, there are issues that are moralized for many people but are seen as important by few—witness the results for abortion in Figure 2—inviting questions about which factors are more significant when it comes to realignment and the perception of political parties (cf. Adams 1997).

Where does moral conviction come from? Here, I must proceed cautiously, since the answer is undoubtedly complex and research can only be described as nascent. Still, there are some plausible sketches of an answer. Using an evolutionary framework and the game theoretic logic of correlated equilibrium, DeScioli and Kurzban (2013) posit the existence of a moral learning system. When conflicts arose in our evolutionary past, deontic rules—communicated within a small group ex ante and internalized by its members—helped bystanders choose sides in a way that lessened the likelihood of a costly conflict. In this perspective, the moralization of some actions (e.g., incest) is easy and noncontroversial, as separate evolutionary pressures make them viscerally aversive.[17] Other moral rules could emerge as a function of the power structure within a specific community. Somewhat like a parent can moralize the theft of cookies from a cookie jar in the eyes of a child, so might an powerful individual or sect actualize local rules conducive to its particular interests.[18] Thus, some content of morality will be general, even approaching the status of human universals. At the same time, since the moral learning system evolved to be "open input," other rules will be context-dependent, giving rise to the endless diversity we see in perceptions of right and wrong.[19] As concerns politics, this perspective suggests that some topics are *more likely* to become moralized, which explains why there is some topical commonality across contexts. But it also leaves plenty of room for moralization to manifest differently for different people.

These ideas are in their infancy and much of the future development will come from psychology. Here, however, I sketch some ways in which political science can contribute to the effort. First, survey measures could examine how specific facets of social and developmental milieu relate to moralization. Do individuals acquire more convictions as they listen to more partisan media? Deeper convictions as they discuss an issue with like-minded friends? Survey measures can help narrow the set of possibilities. Second, the perspectives above suggest a deep connection between morality and coalitional psychology: morality allows coordination and cooperation, even if it also stokes tribalism (see also Haidt 2012, Part III). There is a potentially rich opportunity for research on the historical and contemporary coemergence of moral beliefs and political coalitions. Third, there is some evidence suggestive of the idea that different kinds of appeals can amplify the significance of moral considerations, or submerge it (Cairney, Studlar, and Mamudu 2012; Clifford and Jerit 2013; Marietta 2012; Mucciaroni 2011; Ryan 2012a). Political scientists are well equipped to explore the political conditions that make such moralization more likely and what its consequences are.

Although the study of morality politics draws most heavily on the U.S. case, morality politics is increasingly becoming a point of focus in comparative work (e.g., Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen 2012b; Smith and Tatalovich 2003 and a special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy*[20]), so it is worth a moment to consider how the findings here might transfer outside the United States. At a theoretical level, I have argued that the perception of moral considerations arises from mental programs that are species-typical in humans, even if the content—what is moralized?—varies. As such, it seems reasonable to expect the same basic links between moral conviction, emotional arousal, and political motivations, but the

[17]Wisneski and Skitka (2013) find that activating disgust with disturbing images increases perceptions of moral conviction, but only when the images are supraliminal, not when they are subliminal (viewed for 14ms). They interpret this as evidence that emotions are an important antecedent to moralization, but that conscious processing is also required. See also Skitka (in press).

[18]See also Tooby and Cosmides (2010, especially pp. 213–230) and Robinson, Kurzban, and Jones (2007).

[19]DeScioli and Kurzban's account seems quite consistent with that of Mikhail (2011), who likens moral learning to the acquisition of language. For both mental competencies, the human mind seems to be prepared in advance with models for basic concepts (e.g., "noun" vs. "verb" or "permissible" vs. "forbidden"), but the content (e.g., English vs. Zapotec) will vary.

[20]See Volume 20, Issue 3 (June 2013).

ways they affect politics will depend on aspects institutional structure, such as the extent to which federalism allows policy variation, the expressive opportunities available to interest groups, and other factors (Studlar 2012 for a provocative discussion of how comparative institutions affect morality politics). Institutional features could also modify how attractive a strategy moralization is for elites. Perhaps an effort to moralize an issue would be self-defeating in multiparty parliamentary systems, where electoral competition among parties and interest groups is followed swiftly by a need to coalesce and resolve differences. Testing such hypotheses could be instructive both with respect to institutional politics and the underlying psychology.

To close, I note that the results here continue to develop a set of difficult normative questions that other scholars have begun to ask. Participatory zeal and political engagement are often taken to be desirable in a democracy. Likewise, many hope that citizens have firm beliefs and the will to stand by them. Moral conviction seems to contribute to these things. At the same time, it seems to have a divisive side, leading to a more cynical view of political opponents and perhaps an excess of confidence when it comes to the value of one's own opinions, relative to others. When all is said and done, to understand the underpinnings of our feelings about right and wrong might contribute appreciation and humility in equal measure. As Abelson argued (1988, 274), ''Conviction can give deep meaning to life, but it is also one of the surest ways to make a fool of yourself.''

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