

Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations

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How and why do moral judgments vary across the political spectrum? To test moral foundations theory (J. Haidt & J. Graham, 2007; J. Haidt & C. Joseph, 2004), the authors developed several ways to measure people's use of 5 sets of moral intuitions: Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity, Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity. Across 4 studies using multiple methods, liberals consistently showed greater endorsement and use of the Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity foundations compared to the other 3 foundations, whereas conservatives endorsed and used the 5 foundations more equally. This difference was observed in abstract assessments of the moral relevance of foundation-related concerns such as violence or loyalty (Study 1), moral judgments of statements and scenarios (Study 2), "sacredness" reactions to taboo trade-offs (Study 3), and use of foundation-related words in the moral texts of religious sermons (Study 4). These findings help to illuminate the nature and intractability of moral disagreements in the American "culture war."

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Political campaigns spend vast sums appealing to the self-interests of voters, yet rational self-interest often shows a weak and unstable relationship to voting behavior (Kinder, 1998; Miller, 1999; Sears & Funk, 1991). Voters are also influenced by a wide variety of social and emotional forces (Marcus, 2002; Westen, 2007). Some of these forces are trivial or peripheral factors whose influence we lament, such as a candidate's appearance (Ballew & Todorov, 2007). In recent years increasing attention has been paid to the role of another class of non-self-interested concerns: morality. Voters who seem to vote against their material self-interest are sometimes said to be voting instead for their values, or for their vision of a good society (Lakoff, 2004; Westen, 2007). However, the idea of what makes for a good society is not universally shared. The "culture war" that has long marked American politics (Hunter, 1991) is a clash of visions about such fundamental moral issues as the authority of parents, the sanctity of life and marriage, and the proper response to social inequalities. Ideological commitments

are moral commitments; they are not necessarily strategies for self-enrichment.

In this article we examine moral foundations theory, which was originally developed to describe moral differences across cultures (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Building on previous theoretical work (Haidt & Graham, 2007), we apply the theory to moral differences across the political spectrum within the United States. We propose a simple hypothesis: Political liberals construct their moral systems primarily upon two psychological foundations—Harm/care and Fairness/reciprocity—whereas political conservatives construct moral systems more evenly upon five psychological foundations—the same ones as liberals, plus Ingroup/loyalty, Authority/respect, and Purity/sanctity. We call this hypothesis the *moral foundations hypothesis*, and we present four studies that support it using four different methods.

Liberals and Conservatives

Political views are multifaceted, but a single liberal-conservative (or left-right) continuum is a useful approximation that has predictive validity for voting behavior and opinions on a wide range of issues (Jost, 2006). In terms of political philosophy, the essential element of all forms of liberalism is individual liberty (Gutmann, 2001). Liberals have historically taken an optimistic view of human nature and of human perfectibility; they hold what Sowell (2002) calls an "unconstrained vision" in which people should be left as free as possible to pursue their own courses of personal development. Conservatism, in contrast, is best understood as a "positional ideology," a reaction to the challenges to authority and institutions that are so often mounted by liberals (Muller, 1997). Conservatives have traditionally taken a more

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