

From Barack Obama to Donald Trump: The Evolution of Moral Appeals in National Conventions

Jennifer Lin*

Northwestern University

Abstract

The Moral Foundations Theory was constructed to explain universal human values that are shared by diverse cultures. This theory consists of five foundations of Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority and Purity. The Harm and Fairness foundations are focused on the individual and are known as individualizing foundations while the Ingroup, Authority and Purity foundations are based on the community and are known as binding foundations. The Moral Foundations Theory is often also used to explain the moral differences between liberals and conservatives in the United States. This is because the differences between the political cultures surrounding these ideologies have become so distinct that they resemble unique civilizations on their own. Each side speaks their own language and appeals to their base in unique ways such that they differ in the moral foundations that they emphasize in their speeches. This study focuses on the moral appeals that political elites use to communicate to their supporters. In this paper, I analyze speeches starting from the 2008 to the 2020 Republican and Democrat National Conventions to see if there are differences in the patterns of moral appeals that politicians use in their addresses. From the analysis, I find that Republicans are more likely to appeal to the binding moral foundations, specifically Authority/Tradition while Democrats appeal to individualizing foundations, especially Harm/Care.¹

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In his 2016 Democratic National Convention video address, former President Jimmy Carter proclaimed that the Republican party had nominated a presidential candidate who “seems to violate the moral and ethical principles in which this nation was founded”². In June of 2019, Representative Dan Crenshaw (R-TX) tweeted about the Democrat’s proposed policy to cancel student loan debt, where he claimed “When you say [Cancel Student Debt], you’re saying a minority of people who had the advantage of obtaining a degree should have their debt paid off by hardworking taxpayers ... This is immoral.”³

While it is clear that President Carter and Congressman Crenshaw are addressing different topics, their comments are addressed towards the same theme – appealing to the moral values of their audience through verbal communication. These are not isolated instances. As the political discourse continues to build with each presidential election, we see many more instances of such occurrences that often get covered in the news of the day. For example, we saw this in news coverage that analyzed the politicians’ view the morality of the treatment of migrants along the US Southern Border during the Trump Administration⁴.

These examples from President Carter or Congressman Crenshaw demonstrate a burgeoning pattern in the moralization of politics (Brandt et al., 2015). In general, people are seemingly more likely to respond to political rhetoric that reflects a moral value (Lipsitz, 2018) and even more if it is congruent to their views (Jung, 2020). As politics is seen in terms of what is right and what is wrong (Garrett and Bankert, 2020), people become more likely to see their views as correct and make it be the end all of the policy outcomes (Skitka, 2012). While there is evidence to suggest that the increasing trend to view politics in the path of right versus wrong does not lead to problems in compromises (Ryan, 2017), other scholars see such moral politicization as a possible beginning to out-group hostility (Tappin and McKay, 2019). Across the studies to date in moral psychology, the main focus is on the

²As reported by Politico

³As reported by The Hill

⁴The Hill provides an example with Nancy’s Pelosi’s public address.

use of survey methods to evaluate moral attitudes. However, little has been done to consider the integration of moral values in political speeches. When a politician appeals to one's moral values, they are speaking to the core beliefs that individuals have about themselves and their outlooks on an ideal social world. They are connecting to their supporters through values that they share. The goal of this study is to understand how moral appeals are used in a political context. Specifically, do Democrat and Republican political speeches appeal to different moral foundations? If so, what patterns can we detect that distinguish the parties? For this study, I refer to Democrats and Republicans as liberals and conservatives quite interchangeably. Due to patterns in political polarization, it is increasingly the case that Democrats have become more associated with liberalism and Republicans with conservatism (Abramowitz, 2010; McCarty et al., 2016). In my results, I find that, in political speeches, liberals and conservatives appeal to different moral foundations as defined by the Moral Foundations Theory. Liberals are more likely to relay messages related to protecting people from harm and ensuring a fair system. Conservatives are more likely to speak to preserving the values of this country and focus on self-determination in the American Dream. While these patterns were not entirely clear in the 2008 convention, they became increasingly clear in subsequent conventions through 2020.

1 THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS THEORY

Morality is defined by philosophers to address concerns related to care for others and justice for society and its groups (Haidt, 2012). People care about others and would allow this to influence the ways that they behave and treat others (Turiel, 2002). At the same time, people also want to ensure fairness for those in their groups and that everyone is being treated with respect (Piazza et al., 2018). With this desire for a group, people would be ore likely to cooperate to ensure the fulfillment of this goal.

According to the philosophers, morality is conceptualized in terms of cooperation and care (Turiel, 2002). However, broader moral systems can be more complex than these two values, especially when it comes to explain the ways that morality plays out in daily life (Haidt and Joseph, 2004) and in the internalization of political issues and arguments (Skitka et al., 2021). To formalize our definition of morality in social settings, we use the definition provided by Haidt and Kesebir (2010):

Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible

Morality, as a concept, can be hard to operationalize. While philosophers may see it as an outlet to understanding how people cooperate and care for one another, the definition that people associate with the term “moral” might be more nuanced than cooperative values. To better capture the image of morality in the face of universal human values, the Moral Foundations Theory was developed (Haidt, 2013).

The Moral Foundations Theory is a social psychological concept that aims to figure out why norms vary with culture while still reflecting core human universals (Hibbing et al., 2013). The body of this theory consists of six foundations (Haidt et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Schein and Gray, 2015; Lin et al., 2018) that aim to explain universal human values across different cultures. These foundations developed as a result of the experiences in evolution and the need to ensure the survival of their species (Haidt and Graham, 2007). The definitions for each of the foundations, in brief, are as follows

Harm/Care: The Harm/Care foundation emphasizes the innate sense of empathy that individuals have for others, especially when it comes to caring and protecting individuals who are most vulnerable.

Fairness/Reciprocity: The Fairness/Reciprocity, sometimes also referred as

justice, focuses on equality and truthfulness, especially in the context of a cooperative relationship.

Ingroup/Loyalty: The Ingroup/Loyalty foundation focuses on the concern for building a cohesive group. This foundation values actions related to self-sacrifice in favor of one's group and vigilance towards the outgroups.

Authority/Tradition: The Authority/Tradition principle focuses on the challenges that are present in the course to create a hierarchical society which includes respect for those in power, good leadership and defense of the legitimacy of authority.

Purity/Sanctity: The Purity/Sanctity foundation addresses the motivation to avoid biological contaminants such as pathogens and parasites that posed challenges to human life.

Liberty/Oppression: The Liberty/Oppression foundation focuses on how people react to the presence of domination in their surroundings. It originates from a desire to be able to cooperate in a small group and be wary of the rise of leaders who take power without the consent of the people.

The first five foundations of Harm, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority and Sanctity are the most researched in this area. As such, this paper will focus primarily on these foundations. Furthermore, research in moral foundations suggests that there is a fundamental difference between liberals and conservatives when it comes to the foundations that they internalize (Haidt, 2012). Liberals focus more on the individualizing foundations of Harm/Care and Fairness/Reciprocity. Conservatives, on the other hand, focus more on the binding foundations of Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority/Tradition, and Purity/Sanctity (Graham et al., 2011).

2 APPEALS TO MORALITY IN THE WORK OF POLITICS

Political rhetoric often focuses on appeals to core political traditions, morals and values in an effort to persuade voters to support a cause (Brattebo et al., 2015; Jung, 2020). Consequently, many researchers apply the moral foundations theory to understand how morality is applied in the political context through different methods and lenses (Garten et al., 2016, 2018; Lin et al., 2018). Appealing to the moral values of American voters has become close to appealing to their political ideology (Lakoff, 2010) especially as people internalize concepts of right versus wrong in their political judgments (Garrett and Bankert, 2020). As Noel (2014) argues, conservative value preserving moral traditions associated to the American Dream while liberals want to ensure that everyone is being catered to through government policies. While many of these conversations are based in policy, the underlying meanings are rooted in appealing to the hearts and minds of the voters. We see these patterns in policy arguments that are aimed to persuade the general audience. In a study on the language used in news releases about stem cell research, Clifford and Jerit (2013) noticed that political elites insert their own moral beliefs into their methods of communicating with the people on this matter. In these press releases, liberal authors are more likely to use language that appealed to the Harm and Fairness moral foundations compared to their conservative counterparts.

Political parties maintain a longstanding tradition of hosting national conventions to nominate a candidate for the presidency. This event that once stood as a formality for party leaders to signal a strong party backing to their candidate on the ticket blossomed into a large, televised event drawing a national audience that span several days. In the modern convention, the docket is often filled with speakers who enumerated the various reasons why they support the candidate on the ticket. Rather than focusing on the nomination itself, conventions today are often rallies to motivate core party supporters to bring themselves and their friends to the polls in support of their party's candidates and values. While business

is still being conducted, the pomp and circumstance serve as a precursor to the work ahead. Thus, speakers on the convention docket are often focused on honing in on the message of the party and amplifying the reasons why voters should favor their party over the other.

In this paper, I consider national convention speeches as a gateway to helping us understand moral appeals in politics for several reasons. First, the goals of the parties have diverged from attracting moderate voters to shoring up their base in a more polarized America (Abramowitz, 2010; Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016). As a result, while conventions are watched by people across the country, the goals of the speakers remain to rally their voters around core issues, and ensuring that their side wins over the other. Second, more recent analysis of political rhetoric, especially when it comes to understanding representation in government, considers political speeches to understand how the elites cater to the demands of the voters (Burden, 2007; Griffin and Newman, 2008; Miler, 2018). Despite the policies that are predominant in these contexts, values, such as care for the poor (Miler, 2018) and fairness in minority interests (Griffin and Newman, 2008), nonetheless take front seat to show the people that their representatives have moral values. The fact that these moral values can be detected despite the presence of policies that are in each of these texts. Finally, the focus of the speakers is to focus on making the arguments on why the party they represent is more compassionate and caring for the country and the people it serves. Given the division of the parties on ideological lines and policy preferences (Grossmann and Hopkins, 2016; Levendusky, 2009), the messages that speakers in each convention deliver are relatively representative of the liberal and conservative values that are attributed to the parties simply based on the selection criteria that is often involved to be invited as a speaker to occasions of such caliber (Abramowitz, 2010).

In this study, I hypothesize that, across each of the national conventions, we will see that the Republicans and Democrats appealed to different moral foundations that align with those that their core supporters cherish, as demonstrated by research into liberal and conservative

differences in the moral foundations literature (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt et al., 2009). Despite the political motivations, Democrat convention speakers would be more likely to appeal to the individualizing foundations of Harm and Fairness while Republican convention speakers will be more likely to appeal to the binding foundations of Ingroup, Authority and Purity.

3 METHOD

3.1 The Data

The data for this study come from the 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020 Democrat and Republican National Conventions. Collectively, these four elections in American politics highlight some key moments and transformations in the parties. From the election of the first African American to the White House in 2008 to the nomination of the first woman for President in 2016 and the first Indian American woman for the Vice Presidency in 2020, the Democrats experienced many history-making conventions during this period. Similarly, with the nomination of John McCain, as a national war hero, in 2008 to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the Republicans also saw a shift in their party platform which went from the desires of the party's rank and file to being trumped by a former reality TV star turned businessman. The data used in this study reflect the docket of speakers who were chosen by the party to represent their platform and interests. The majority of the speakers included in this set are prime time speakers whose words were embargoed for delivery by major news sites. To my knowledge, the speeches available and included in this study are the most complete based on transcripts collected and archived by major news outlets like Politico, New York Times, PR Newswire (Cision), CNN, TIME magazine, NPR, and Rev Transcription services, among

other sites, that are available for public use⁵. For each of the years studied, the speeches that are present are representative of the sentiment and the party’s goals. Even though not all speakers may be included, the leaders of the party and the nominees are. Since these pieces are often the highlight of their respective nights and of the convention, which results in high viewer traffic, their speeches are, collectively, representative of the party platform as is. In what follows, I describe the corpus of data for each of the conventions.

3.1.1 DEMOCRAT NATIONAL CONVENTION (DNC)

The 2008 Democrat National Convention was held in Denver, Colorado between August 25 to 27 at the Pepsi Center. This convention was historical, with the nomination of the first African American for president, and the speeches acquired reflect the highlights of the occasion. With a corpus of 28,827 words spanning 17 speeches, the corpus includes speeches from Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Michelle Obama and other notable figures.

In 2012, the Democrat National Convention focused on getting four more years of the Obama administration. This event was hosted in Charlotte, North Carolina from September 3 to 6. The corpus consisted of 84,369 words spanning 109 speeches.

The 2016 convention was held from July 25 to July 28 at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During the program, the party hosted a diverse docket of speakers whose addresses focused on making the argument for a first female president in the history of the country. For the analysis, the corpus for the DNC convention contained 147 speeches containing 105,035 words.

The 2020 Democrat National Convention focused on nominating Joe Biden with the prospect of a diverse ticket that can combat the ills of racism and a global pandemic. However, due to the Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic, the convention that was scheduled

⁵Per recommendations from C-SPAN, best efforts were made to contact the respective national committees for convention programming transcripts via Freedom of Information Act requests but this request was unsuccessful.

to take place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin was instead held online via primetime livestream from 9:00 PM to 11:00 PM Eastern Time from August 17 to August 20. While they had a variety of caucus meetings during the day to establish their party platform, I will focus my analyses strictly on the primetime events to match the Republican convention model. This was also done because, due to expectations of high viewership, the notable speakers were all included in this block of time so that they can be the face of the convention and the party. This multimedia platform provided opportunities for a host of speakers and videos, which collectively created a corpus of 82,366 words spanning 1693 lines. Compared to previous years, this convention departs from the speaker model since the online nature allowed for more dialogue among speakers. Consequently, Rev Transcription Services classifies each new speaker in dialogues as their own line. For consistency and comparison with the Republican National Convention, this format will be maintained.

3.1.2 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION (RNC)

The 2008 Republican National Convention was held in the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minnesota from September 1 to 4 and featured speakers that highlight the reasons why the country should elect John McCain to the presidency. This corpus contains 21,111 words across 10 speeches, and features many of the key speakers from the convention including John McCain, George Bush, and Sarah Palin.

In 2012, the Republicans focused their efforts on nominating Mitt Romney to prevent another four more years of the Obama administration. This convention was held in Tampa, Florida at the Tampa Bay Times Forum from August 27 to 30. The corpus included for this analysis contains 46,856 words over 33 speeches.

The 2016 convention was held from July 18 to July 21, 2016 at the Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio to nominate Donald J. Trump for the presidency. This corpus created from this convention contains 63 speeches with 65,671 words.

For the 2020 convention, the goal of the Republican Party is to convince voters that they should elect President Trump to another term in office. This convention was originally planned to be in Charlotte, North Carolina but the event was moved to a primetime format similar to the Democrats due to COVID-19 restrictions. Their convention took place between August 24 and August 27 and featured a host of videos and speakers supporting the “Make America Great Again” platform. Collectively, this provides a corpus of 92,868 words in 1096 lines, which reflects all of the prime time shows on each of the nights.

3.2 Materials

For this study, each speech was gathered and sorted by day, speaker, type of delivery (speech, video transcript, or benediction), and source of the transcript. For reproducibility, these transcripts are packaged into the `poltextR` R package. In order to keep the conventions for each year to be as comparable in quality for both parties, items that were collected for one party that were not for the other were excluded. Therefore, the 2008 and 2012 corpora are most exclusively prime time convention coverage. For 2016, I was able to acquire invocations and benedictions for the Democrat convention but not the Republicans, hence these were excluded for the Democrats in the analyses. This is a prime example of the need to balance out the conventions regarding quality and content of speeches. While one could argue that the invocation and benediction speakers are still convention speakers, the nature of these addresses invoke the notion of God and religion, such that it would add more purity appeals to the Democrats without the Republicans getting this same addition. This might inflate the appeals to purity for the Democrats, such that, at face, they may have more appeals to purity, but much of this may actually be from invocations. Any appeals to purity from the Republicans, would be squarely from speeches and not these convention prayers. For 2020, both conventions reflect the entirety of the two hour prime time coverage for four nights in each of the conventions since this data was available for both parties in this form that was

not in the previous years. These two hours each day were designed especially for a national audience, which signal that this time would be the most representative of how the party would highlight their platform, mission and values.

3.3 Analysis Plan

In 2009, Graham et al. (2009) developed the Moral Foundations Dictionary for use with the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program created by Pennebaker et al. (2007). Through this process, the goal is to count the number of appearances of words associated with each of the moral foundations and generate a composite score that reflects the total percentage each foundation is utilized in the speech. While counting words alone has pitfalls when it comes to shorter texts, this method has been sufficient when understanding the bigger picture in larger works (Garten et al., 2016).

To build on the original Moral Foundations Dictionary Graham et al. (2009), Frimer et al. (2019) added more words and greater variations in word tenses to increase the ability to capture moral appeals based on common word embedding. The analyses in this paper will take advantage of this more refined version of the Moral Foundations Dictionary.

In this study, I will analyze the speeches available from each of the national conventions to understand their moral appeals using the Moral Foundations Dictionary. Each speech will be compiled and analyzed using the `quanteda` package (Benoit and Nulty, 2017). This package is constructed as the open source version of LIWC and operates similarly to the intended software. For this analysis, the speeches are compiled into separate corpora sorted by convention and year using the `quanteda.corpora` package, which yields four unique corpora.

To analyze the text, I use the `quanteda.dictionaries` package. This program is preloaded with the most updated version of the Moral Foundations Dictionary, among other LIWC-compatible dictionaries. I use the analysis model described by Graham et al. (2009),

which uses each text as the unit of analysis. By comparing the text to the dictionary, the program generates a score that represents the percent in which words for the positive or negative aspect of a foundation appear out of the total number of words in the text. The positive and negative percent scores for each foundation are summed and t-tests are conducted to compare the differences in moral word usage on each of the foundations between the political parties.

Similar to LIWC output from software, `quanteda-dictionaries` computes the percent of words in a text that match specific categories in a dictionary out of the number of words in the text. As a result, the unit of analysis is the speech, or line (for 2020). These percentages are averaged across the convention for each foundation and I will discuss them in the next section.

4 RESULTS

Starting with the earliest convention year, the 2008 convention results do not demonstrate a difference in moral appeals for Democrat or Republican speakers. Across the board, Democrats and Republicans appeal to Harm ($t = 0.362$, $p = .721$, $d = .144$), Fairness ($t = 1.495$, $p = .147$, $d = .513$), Ingroup ($t = 0.377$, $p = .712$, $d = .165$), Authority ($t = -1.317$, $p = .204$, $d = -.531$) and Purity ($t = -0.902$, $p = .380$, $d = -.370$) at similar rates even though, on average, Republicans had a slightly higher percentage of appeals to Authority and Purity. This is consistent with previous research on the partisan moral appeals.

In 2012, Democrats made more appeals to each of the moral foundations when compared to Republicans except Purity. Out of all the words that were spoken in this convention, Democrats used more appeals to Harm ($t = 6.284$, $p < .001$, $d = .864$), Fairness ($t = 2.629$, $p = .01$, $d = .364$), Ingroup ($t = 2.679$, $p = .009$, $d = .410$) and Authority ($t = 2.221$, $p = .030$, $d = .412$). These effects are rather large, especially for the Harm foundation.

Republicans had a slightly higher percentage of appeals to Purity across all the words used in their convention speeches, but this difference is not statistically significant at $\alpha = .05$ ($t = 1.819$, $p = .073$, $d = -.319$).

The results of the word count method for the text analysis of the 2016 convention speeches, as displayed in Table 3 and Figure 3, suggest that the Republicans were more likely to use the Authority/Tradition foundation ($t = -2.937$, $p = .004$, $d = -.445$), while Democrats were more likely to use the Harm/Care foundation ($t = 3.739$, $p < .001$, $d = .467$) in their speeches. Additionally, we see that Republicans are slightly more likely to appeal to the Purity foundation, even if this effect is not as pronounced ($t = -1.944$, $p = .054$, $d = -.297$). The Republicans, in this election cycle, focused more on maintaining the image of the country with their “Make America Great Again” appeals and called to preserve the values associated with the founding principles of the country. Democrats, on the other hand, sought to speak to a variety of interests and ensure that they appealed to all their voters’ specific interests. Culture war issues such as abortion and gay marriage were hot topics of this election, with Republicans moving to cite God on these topics. These patterns can help explain why the results show that the Democrats are more likely to appeal to the care of people from diverse backgrounds while Republicans are more likely to appeal to traditions and religion.

Turing to the 2020 national convention speeches, the results show a similar pattern in appeals between the parties. As Table 4 and Figure 4 show, Democrats had more appeals to the Harm/Care foundation ($t = 2.784$, $p = .005$, $d = .100$). Republicans were also had more appeals to the Authority/Tradition foundation ($t = -3.117$, $p = .001$, $d = -.118$). Unlike the 2016 convention, where there was little difference between the conventions on the Purity/Sanctity foundation, the Republicans made more appeals to this foundation in their 2020 convention ($t = -3.508$, $p < .001$, $d = -.148$).

Table 1: *Morality in 2008 Convention Speeches*

Foundation	Percentage		<i>t</i>	Effect Size (<i>d</i>)
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.10	1.02	0.362	0.144
Fairness	0.30	0.20	1.495	0.513
Ingroup	1.50	1.40	0.377	0.165
Authority	0.88	1.11	-1.317	-0.531
Purity	0.32	0.39	-0.902	-0.370

Notes: The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.
 (*) $p = .1$, * $p = .05$, ** $p = .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

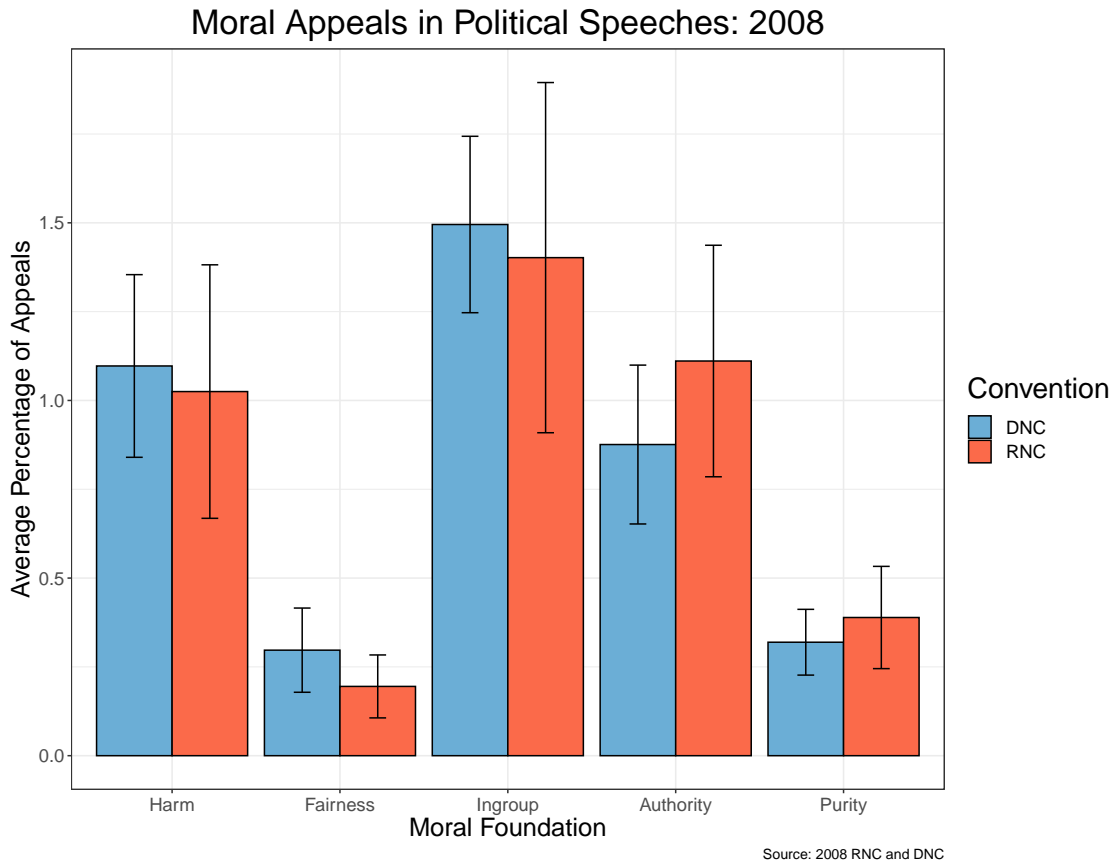


Figure 1: Cell Means and 95% Confidence Intervals for moral appeals by foundation and convention in the 2012 Election

Table 2: *Morality in 2012 Convention Speeches*

Foundation	Percentage		t	Effect Size (d)
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.25	0.64	6.284***	0.864
Fairness	0.35	0.18	2.629**	0.384
Ingroup	1.22	0.96	2.679**	0.410
Authority	1.57	1.38	2.221*	0.412
Purity	0.27	0.37	-1.819(*)	-0.319

Notes: The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.
 (*) $p = .1$, * $p = .05$, ** $p = .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

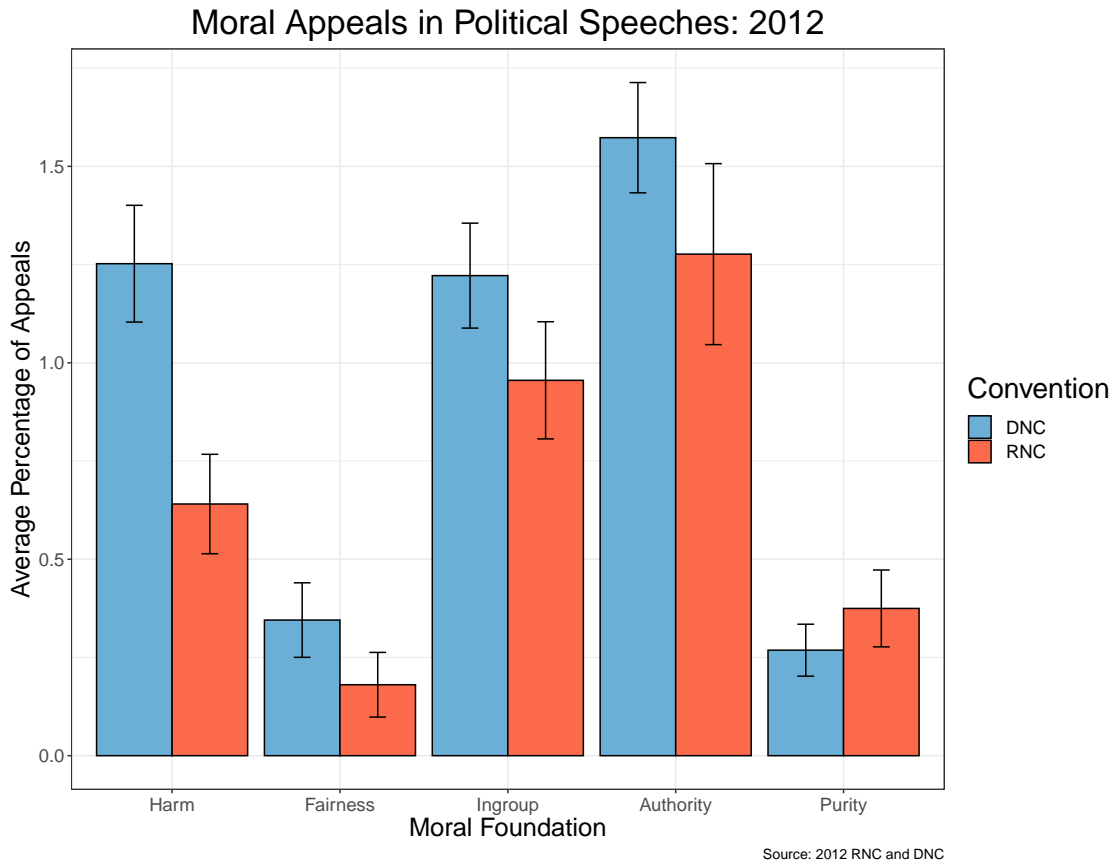


Figure 2: Cell Means and 95% Confidence Intervals for moral appeals by foundation and convention in the 2012 Election

Table 3: *Morality in 2016 Convention Speeches*

Foundation	Percentage		t	Effect Size (d)
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.55	1.1	3.739***	0.467
Fairness	0.52	0.43	1.078	0.165
Ingroup	1.42	1.32	0.804	0.114
Authority	1.01	1.32	-2.937**	-0.449
Purity	0.41	0.57	-1.944(*)	-0.297

Notes: The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.
 (*) $p = .1$, * $p = .05$, ** $p = .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

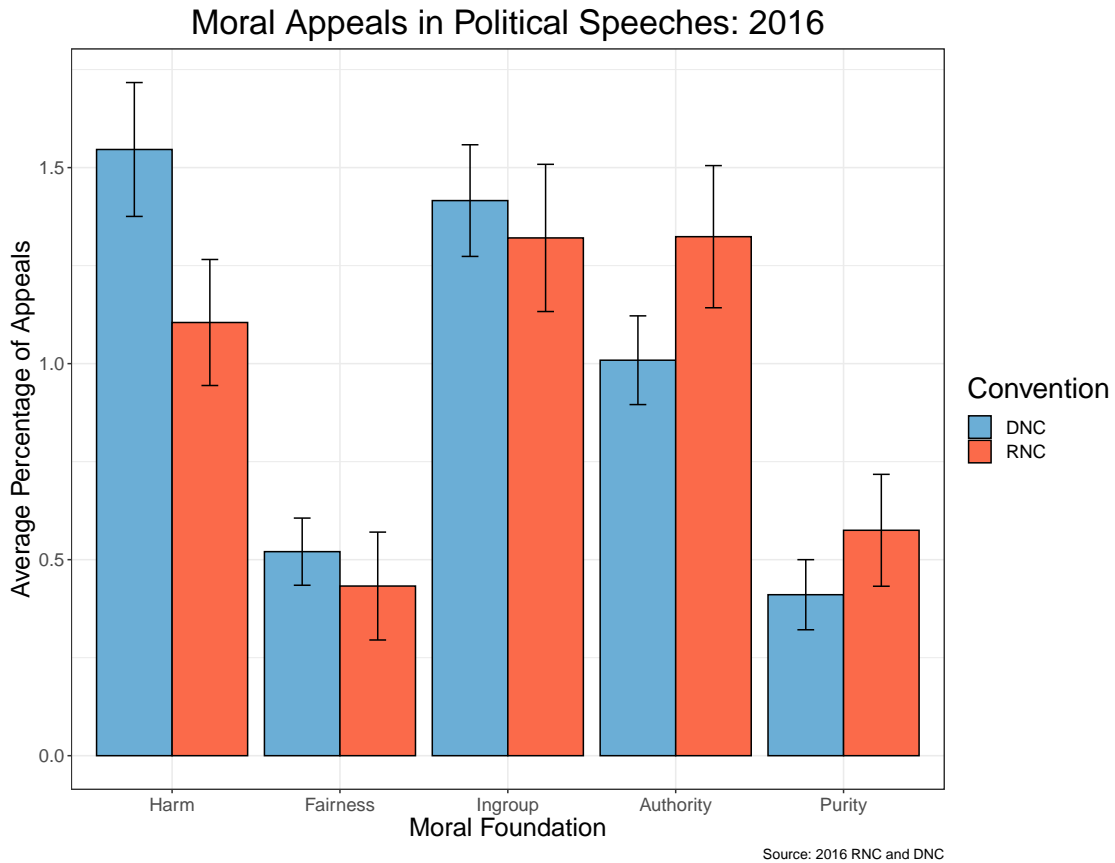


Figure 3: Cell Means and 95% Confidence Intervals for moral appeals by foundation and convention in the 2016 Election

Table 4: *Morality in 2020 Convention Speeches*

Foundation	Percentage		t	Effect Size (d)
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.31	1.04	2.784**	0.100
Fairness	0.51	0.43	1.04	0.039
Ingroup	1.28	1.30	-0.205	-0.008
Authority	1.09	1.39	-3.117***	-0.118
Purity	0.44	0.71	-3.508***	-0.148

Notes: The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.
 (*) $p = .1$, * $p = .05$, ** $p = .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

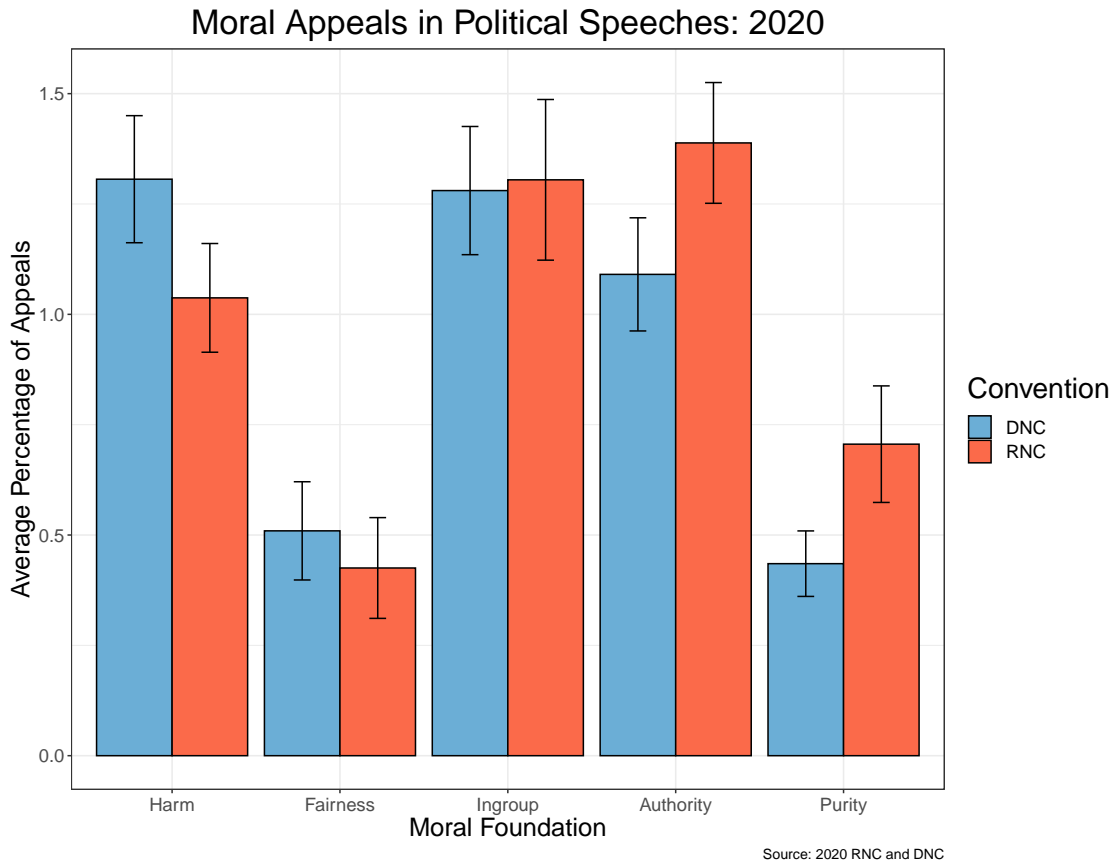


Figure 4: Cell Means and 95% Confidence Intervals for moral appeals by foundation and convention in the 2020 Election

5 DISCUSSION

From the analyses of the speeches between the parties and the years, Democrats, in line with the findings from Graham et al. (2009), appealed to Harm/Care with the exception of the 2008 convention and Republicans for Authority/Tradition except 2012. In 2020, Republicans also had significantly more appeals to Purity/Sanctity compared to the Democrats than in 2016.

The patterns displayed in these analyses align with the trends of moral foundations research, which suggests that liberals are more likely to appeal to individuality while conservatives tend to value the traditional community. Through analyzing the Democratic and Republican National Convention speeches, we see these patterns emerge despite the goals of such conventions. While they exist to nominate a presidential candidate and launch policy proposals to lure independent voters, the speakers reflect what voters see as those fighting for quintessential values of the party. As such, each speaker for the conventions address issues that the party aims to represent in their public image, such as religiosity and gun rights for the Republicans, and women’s health and sensible gun laws for the Democrats.

The major assumption in this paper is that Democrats and Republicans, within the parties, all rally around the same goals and that their convention speeches reflect the desires of the median of their respective parties. In the more recent conventions, this does not seem to be the case. Political parties are not meant to be monolithic ideological clusters (Noel, 2014) and the campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump seem to suggest this. On numerous occasions, both candidates seem to be disliked by the rank and file of their parties, especially when they first declared their candidacies in 2016. While both gained steam within their respective parties, there still remains many who will not support their causes. Due to partisan sorting (Levendusky, 2009), I am able to take the conventions as a reflection of ideologies. However, there are heterogeneous environments within each party as well, such

that there are some Republicans that are more liberal than others (Weber and Federico, 2013). Future research can analyze these within parties to understand if partisans are as morally sorted as they are politically, and whether moral appeals in text are distinguishably different within a party as they are between parties. To analyze the partisans' morality within parties, I might be able to use the debate comments that were made in the Democrats' 2020 Presidential Primary or issue statements that the candidates post on their websites. The diversity of candidates in the primary field provides us with different candidates on different locations on the liberal side of the ideological spectrum.

In addition, future research can consider moral appeals by politicians in broader contexts. Here, the focus rests on special interests in the presidential nominating convention. However, it goes without saying that politicians at various levels of government are in the public eye in multiple venues. Previous research has considered these venues and found moral appeals to increase the desire for people to pay attention to politics (Lipsitz, 2018) and to participate in politics (Jung, 2020). As a result, politicians have the incentive to make moral appeals elsewhere. Future research can consider these other venues and compare them across time. These can include presidential debates or congressional tweets, newsletters or press releases.

Finally, future research can connect the moral appeals of political speech to evaluations of political leaders, parties and ordinary voters. Since moral conviction lends to an attitude where the beholder believes that they are right and that their positions are the morally preferred outcomes, they may be most likely to like politicians who speak to these moral values and evaluate issues appealed in this fashion to be more favorable (Ryan, 2017; Skitka et al., 2021). As a result, do speeches, tweets or advertisements that make moral appeals draw greater support for the issue, candidate or idea that it is promoting? Do people who listen to these speeches like the person or the group who is making these arguments more if they use moral appeals? Finally, how do these moral appeals in speech translate to attitudes towards people in the general public who may or may not agree with these moral positions?

Given that people who moralize politics tend to like their side more, does this necessarily lead to increased affective polarization, or hostile feelings towards members of the opposite party (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019)?

This analysis replicated the methods and findings of the Graham et al. (2009) study. As Frimer (2019) suggests, there is more work to be done to understand the true magnitude of difference between the types of moral appeals that the parties use. Additionally, there is more work to be done to understand the political, social and emotional reactions to the use of moral appeals in politics. But for now, the analyses highlight the differences in appeals that the parties engage with to mobilize their voters to the polls in early November. There is clearly a difference in the moral appeals that partisans choose to use, and these patterns seems to consistently define the parties since the election of Barack Obama to Donald Trump and will perhaps continue to define the parties in the years to come.

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