

Morally Reframed Arguments Can Affect Support for Political Candidates

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Abstract

Moral reframing involves crafting persuasive arguments that appeal to the values of the target, but argue in favor or against something that target would typically oppose (Feinberg & Willer, 2015). Past research has shown moral reframing to be an effective strategy for persuading liberals to be more supportive of conservative positions, and conservatives to be more supportive of liberal positions. Extending this work, the current paper investigated the effectiveness of moral reframing in influencing attitudes about candidates running for political office. We argued that messages criticizing a conservative candidate crafted in a way that appeals to the moral values of conservatives can decrease conservative support for that person, while messages criticizing a liberal candidate crafted to appeal to the values of liberals can decrease liberal support for that person. We tested these claims in the context of the 2016 American presidential election. In Study 1 ($n = 397$), conservatives who read a message opposing Donald Trump grounded in the more conservative value of loyalty supported him less than conservatives reading a message grounded in fairness concerns. In Study 2 ($n = 392$), liberals presented with a message opposing Hillary Clinton appealing to the more liberal value of fairness were less supportive of Clinton than liberals in a loyalty-argument condition. These results extend the applicability of moral reframing to political candidates and highlight how it can be a useful tool for overcoming rigid stances partisans often hold regarding political candidates, and may provide a means for opinion change and political acceptance.

Morally Reframed Arguments Can Affect Support for Political Candidates

Political elections provide the general populace with a choice between two (or more) candidates who have contrasting viewpoints on how best to serve the people and their needs. These viewpoints, and the candidates who endorse them, often fall into opposing sides of the political spectrum, with one candidate representing a more liberal perspective and the other representing a more conservative perspective. Generally, people's support for one candidate or the other reflects whether they identify with the liberal or conservative perspective that each candidate embodies (e.g., gallup.com, n.d.).

Despite these ideological allegiances, candidates, their campaigns, and everyday supporters invest substantial time and resources in hopes of persuading those who endorse the other candidate that he or she is the wrong person for the job. Even though this process is commonplace and exorbitant amounts of money are devoted to it (Cummings, 2008), it is largely unknown whether such attempts at persuasion are ever effective and, if they are, what types of arguments have the greatest impact.

In the present research we explore the possibility that certain types of moral arguments can be an effective strategy for persuading liberals and conservatives to be less attached to the candidate who represents their party and perspective, and therefore be more open to the arguments of the other party's candidate. Specifically, we examine the effectiveness of a technique called "moral reframing" (Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015) in the context of the United States 2016 presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump.

Morality and Political Attitudes

Morality matters for political attitudes (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Baldacci, 2008; Morgan, Skitka, & Wisneski, 2010). Liberals and conservatives possess different moral worldviews, and such differences help explain many of the contrasting stances the two sides take

(Caprara, Schwartz, Capanna, Vecchione, & Barbaranelli, 2006; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Thorisdottir, Jost, Liviatan, & Shrout, 2007). Recently, researchers mapped the moral domain and found evidence for five moral foundations that form the basis of moral beliefs and judgments (Haidt & Josephs, 2004; Graham et al., 2011).¹ The harm/care foundation is concerned with other's suffering and the need to prevent and alleviate such suffering. The fairness/cheating foundation relates to justice, equality, and discrimination. The loyalty/betrayal foundation emphasizes the importance of one's in-group, and prioritizing that in-group. The authority/subversion foundation deals with respect for higher-ranked individuals as well as adherence to tradition. Finally, the sanctity/degradation foundation is concerned with sacredness and purity, and avoiding disgust-evoking behaviors (Haidt, 2007, 2012; Haidt & Joseph, 2004).

Research has, in turn, examined how differences in endorsement of each of the moral foundations explain differences in political ideology. It was found that compared to conservatives, liberals' more strongly endorse the harm/care and the fairness/cheating foundations, while conservatives more strongly endorse the loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation foundations (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007). This pattern has since been replicated in various countries (Graham et al., 2009; Hofmann, Wisneski, Brandt, & Skitka, 2014; Lewis & Bates, 2011; Nilsson & Erlandsson, 2015; van Leeuwen & Park, 2009), and, overall, converges well with work on the fundamental moral differences separating liberals and conservatives (Caprara et al., 2006; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Lakoff 2002; Thorisdottir et al., 2007).

Moral Reframing and Candidate Arguments

¹ More recently, a sixth dimension has been added (cf. Haidt, 2012)

Building on this understanding of the moral divide between liberals and conservatives, recent research has shown that it is possible to capitalize on these distinctions for purposes of political persuasion and coalition formation by using “moral reframing” (Day, Fiske, Downing, & Trail, 2014; Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015; Kidwell, Farmer, & Hardesty, 2013; Wolsko, Ariceaga, & Seiden, 2016). Moral reframing involves framing arguments that favor one’s own political stance, but grounding these arguments in moral terms that appeal to the moral values of those on the other side of the political spectrum. Research has shown that while liberals are unmoved by arguments in favor of a conservative policy that are grounded in the more conservative moral foundations, their support for the conservative position increases after reading messages grounded in the more liberal foundations, and this research also demonstrates the reverse when it comes to liberals persuading conservative targets (Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015; Kidwell et al., 2013; Wolsko et al., 2016; cf., Day et al., 2014). As an example, conservative Americans became more supportive of same-sex marriage after reading a message that was grounded in loyalty values (“same-sex couples are proud and patriotic Americans”), but not if the message was grounded in fairness values (“same-sex couples should be treated equally to opposite-sex couples”). Furthermore, liberals became more supportive of high levels of military spending after reading a message that was grounded in fairness (“the military helps the disadvantaged to overcome poverty and inequality”), but not if the message was grounded in loyalty and authority values (“the military ensures that the United States is the greatest nation in the world”; Feinberg & Willer, 2015).

Although this past research has shown that moral reframing can be an effective strategy for persuading those on the other side of the political spectrum to be more supportive of policies they would typically oppose, no research has explored the effectiveness of moral reframing in one of the most contentious, but fundamental, political domains – political campaigns. Might

moral reframing be an effective means for affecting support for political candidates? We expected that it would, because moral evaluations are particularly relevant for person perception and impression formation overall (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014), and are especially relevant when making judgments about powerful figures and political candidates (Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2012; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Trevino, Hartman, & Brown, 2000).

Additionally, moral reframing research has primarily focused on the effectiveness of morally reframed messages in support of a stance, and has largely not explored whether this technique would also work when arguments are made in opposition to a stance. Even so, understanding moral reframing's effectiveness in decreasing a target's support is particularly important, considering how much political rhetoric aims to decrease support for a policy or a political candidate. We predicted that the same underlying processes will apply regardless of whether a morally reframed message is in favor or in opposition to a stance; as long as the argument itself is framed in a manner that appeals directly to the moral values of the targets, then those targets should be responsive to it because it fits with their morality.

The Present Research

We tested our predictions by examining the effectiveness of morally reframed messages in the context of the U.S. presidential election campaign of 2016, presenting participants with short campaign messages in opposition to either Donald Trump (Study 1) or Hillary Clinton (Study 2). In each study, these messages were framed either in terms of a moral value endorsed at higher levels by conservatives (i.e., loyalty) or a moral value endorsed at higher levels by liberals (i.e., fairness). We expected that conservatives would become less supportive of Donald Trump after reading an oppositional message grounded in loyalty values than after reading a message grounded in fairness values. On the other hand, we expected liberals would become less

supportive of Hillary Clinton after reading an oppositional message grounded in fairness values than after reading a message grounded in loyalty values.

We did not make any specific predictions regarding how liberals would respond to the anti-Trump messages, and how conservatives would respond to the different messages in opposition to Clinton. Although the anti-Trump messages framed in more liberal moral terms might resonate with liberals and the anti-Clinton messages framed in more conservative moral terms might resonate with conservatives, these arguments may still be ineffective because they were aiming to persuade targets to take on a position that, likely, they already held (cf. Day et al., 2014). Even if these messages resonated with those who already opposed the candidate, it is possible that we would not see much movement due to a floor effect – i.e., the conservative participants already have such a low level of support for Clinton that they could not experience a reduction in support for her, and the liberal participants already have such a low level of support for Trump that they could not really experience a reduction in support for him.

Study 1

In the first study, we presented participants with arguments opposing Donald Trump that were framed in terms of either fairness or loyalty moral concerns. We hypothesized that conservatives in the loyalty argument condition would support Trump less than conservatives in the fairness argument condition, but the moderate and liberal participants would likely be unaffected by our manipulation. We measured support for Donald Trump, our dependent variable, with both attitudes (warmth and acceptance as president) and behavioral intentions (likelihood to vote for Trump), and tested whether the effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for him might be mediated by the attitudes measures.

Method

Participants. Four hundred and four participants recruited from the Amazon Mechanical Turk website completed the study. Participants were excluded if they had missing values ($n = 3$) or if they failed an attention check ($n = 4$). Thus, the final sample size consisted of 397 participants (189 male, 207 female, 1 other; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.33$, $SD = 12.94$). Participants took part in this study on August 28th 2016, 72 days prior to the 2016 presidential election, and were given a small payment for their participation.

Procedure. Participants learned they would be presented with some information about a candidate for the 2016 presidential election and be asked questions afterwards. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions: the loyalty or fairness argument condition. Both conditions involved presenting participants with a short message arguing against Donald Trump, modeled after actual campaign advertisements. The loyalty message was written so that it would appeal to the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation, incorporating words and phrases representative of that foundation (cf. Graham et al., 2009). For instance, the loyalty message argued that Trump “has repeatedly behaved disloyally towards our country to serve his own interests” and that “during the Vietnam War, he dodged the draft to follow his father into the development business” (for full text, see Appendix A). The fairness argument, in contrast, appealed to the fairness/cheating moral foundation and used words and phrases representative of that foundation. For instance, it argued that Trump “openly discriminates against Muslims threatening their rights to be treated with fairness and equality” and that “his unfair statements are a breeding ground for prejudice” (for full text, see Appendix A). Each message was accompanied by a picture of Donald Trump further highlighting the corresponding moral value, either showing him next to American soldiers in action (loyalty argument condition) or next to Muslims demonstrating against terrorism (fairness argument condition).

Following the campaign message, participants were asked to summarize the message they just read, which served as an attention check. Two raters coded whether participants' answers to the attention check indicated that the participants actually read the arguments. The inter-rater reliability was high ($\phi = .70$). We excluded only those participants for which both coders rated the summary as inadequate². Afterwards, participants completed three measures relating to Donald Trump. *Warmth* was measured with the item: “How warm or cold do you feel toward Donald Trump?”, answered on a scale from 0 (very cold) to 100 (very warm). *Acceptance as President* was measured with the item: “How easy or hard would it be for you to accept Donald Trump as the President of the United States?”, answered on a scale from 0 (very easy) to 100 (very hard). Finally, *Likelihood to Vote* was measured with the item: “In the upcoming 2016 presidential election, how likely are you to vote for Donald Trump for president?”, answered on a scale from 0 (very unlikely) to 100 (very likely). The initial position of the slider for all three items was at the midpoint of the scales. Finally, participants completed a demographic questionnaire which included a measure of political ideology (“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as conservative, moderate, or liberal?”) with three response categories (conservative, moderate, and liberal).

² The results were robust for different exclusion procedures. Not excluding participants due to the attention check (final $n = 401$) did not change the results substantively. Excluding participants whose summaries were judged as inadequate by at least one rater (final $n = 393$) also did not change the results substantively.

Analysis strategy. We conducted separate multiple regression analyses for the three dependent variables³. A dummy variable for moral argument condition (fairness argument as reference group), two dummy variables for political ideology (conservatives as reference group), and the interaction terms of condition and ideology were included as independent variables. While we expected different effects of the moral argument condition for the different ideology groups (implying an interaction effect), our main focus was *a priori* on the simple-slopes analyses. In addition, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using Model 8 of Hayes' Process macro (Hayes, 2013). We included experimental condition as independent variable, ideology as moderator, *warmth* and *acceptance as president* as mediators, and *likelihood to vote for Trump* as dependent variable. A bias corrected bootstrap estimation approach with 5000 samples was used to estimate the indirect effects.

Results

Warmth. Means and standard deviations for each condition by ideology group are presented in Table 1a. The regression analysis showed a significant interaction effect, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$,

³ An inspection of a plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values indicated that the assumption of homoscedasticity might be violated. So, we also ran the analyses with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. The results did not change substantively except for the following differences. For *warmth*, the interaction effect and the effect for conservatives became both marginally significant. For *likelihood to vote for Trump*, the effect for liberals became significant.

$F(2, 391) = 3.14, p = .044$.⁴ Simple-slopes analyses indicated that, as expected, conservative participants perceived Trump as less warm in the loyalty argument condition than in the fairness argument condition, $b = -13.82, t(391) = -2.53, p = .012, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-24.58, -3.06]$. There was no significant effect of the moral argument condition for either moderates, $b = -1.43, t(391) = -0.34, p = .736, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-9.75, 6.90]$, or liberals, $b = 2.90, t(391) = 0.75, p = .453, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-4.69, 10.50]$.

Acceptance as president. Means and standard deviations for each condition by ideology group are presented in Table 1b. The regression analyses showed a significant interaction effect, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01, F(2, 391) = 3.48, p = .032$. Simple-slopes analyses indicated that, as expected, conservative participants accepted Trump less as president in the loyalty argument condition than in the fairness argument condition, $b = -15.39, t(391) = -2.20, p = .028, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-29.14, -1.65]$. There was no significant effect of the moral argument condition for either moderates, $b = 1.13, t(391) = 0.21, p = .835, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-9.51, 11.76]$, or liberals, $b = 7.09, t(391) = 1.44, p = .152, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-2.62, 16.80]$.

Likelihood to vote for Trump. Means and standard deviations for each condition by ideology group are presented in Table 1c. The interaction effect was significant, $\Delta R^2 = 0.02, F(2, 391) = 4.84, p = .008$. Simple-slopes analyses indicated that, as expected, conservative participants were less likely to vote for Trump in the loyalty argument condition than in the fairness argument condition, $b = -18.87, t(391) = -2.91, p = .004, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-31.61, -6.14]$. There was no significant effect of the moral argument condition for either moderates, $b = -0.45,$

⁴ Treating ideology as a continuous moderator also leads to significant interaction effects in the predicted direction for the three dependent variables (warmth, acceptance as president, likelihood to vote; $ps < .05$).

$t(391) = -0.09, p = .929, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-10.30, 9.40]$, or liberals, $b = 5.65, t(391) = 1.24, p = .217, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-3.34, 14.65]$. These findings are illustrated in Figure 1.

Moderated mediation analyses. The results of the moderated mediation analysis were consistent with our hypotheses. For conservatives, the effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Trump was mediated by warmth, $b = -12.15, SE = 6.26, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-25.07, -0.56]$, and by acceptance as president, $b = -1.73, SE = 1.07, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-4.69, -0.22]$, and the direct effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Trump was not significant for conservatives, $b = -4.99, t(389) = -1.36, p = .173, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-12.19, 2.21]$. For moderates, there was no indirect effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Trump, for warmth: $b = -1.25, SE = 4.54, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-10.19, 7.75]$, or for acceptance as president: $b = 0.13, SE = 0.70, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-1.27, 1.61]$. The direct effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Trump was also not significant for moderates, $b = 0.68, t(389) = 0.24, p = .810, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-4.85, 6.20]$. Likewise, for liberals, there was no indirect effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Trump, for warmth: $b = 2.55, SE = 1.88, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-1.15, 6.32]$, or for acceptance as president: $b = 0.80, SE = 0.56, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.04, 2.27]$, and the direct effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Trump was not significant for liberals, $b = 2.30, t(389) = 0.90, p = .371, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-2.75, 7.36]$.

Discussion

We found causal evidence that, compared to arguments in opposition to Donald Trump grounded in fairness concerns, arguments opposing Trump that appealed to the more conservative value of loyalty were more effective in causing conservative participants to feel colder towards Trump, to accept him less as president, and, most importantly, to be less likely to vote for him. Further, the results suggest that the effect of moral argument condition on the likelihood to vote for Trump was mediated by perceived warmth and acceptance as president for conservatives. We

did not find convincing evidence that the moral argument condition affected the support of moderates and liberals for Donald Trump.

Study 2

In Study 2, we aimed to conceptually replicate Study 1 with Hillary Clinton as the target instead of Donald Trump. That is, we presented participants with arguments opposing Hillary Clinton's candidacy that were framed in terms of either fairness or loyalty moral concerns. We hypothesized that liberals in the fairness argument condition would support Clinton less than liberals in the loyalty argument condition, while the manipulation would not affect the moderates or conservatives. We measured support for Hillary Clinton with the same measures as in Study 1 (warmth, acceptance as president, and likelihood to vote for Clinton), and tested whether the effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for her would be mediated by the attitudes measures.

Method

Participants. Four hundred and eight participants recruited from the Amazon Mechanical Turk website completed the study. Participants were excluded if they had missing values ($n = 3$) or if they failed the attention check ($n = 13$). Thus, the final sample size consisted of 392 participants (172 male, 218 female, 1 agender, 1 genderqueer; $M_{\text{age}} = 36.86$, $SD = 12.24$). Participants took part in this study on September 2nd 2016, 67 days prior to the 2016 presidential election, and were given a small payment for their participation.

Procedure. The procedure paralleled that of Study 1, except the target of the message this time was Hillary Clinton instead of Donald Trump. Accordingly, we formulated messages in opposition to Clinton grounded in either loyalty or fairness values. For instance, the loyalty message argued that Clinton “is willing to risk the standing of our nation to achieve her own goals” and that “she failed our ambassador and soldiers in Benghazi” (for full text, see Appendix

A). The fairness argument, in contrast, argued that “while so many Americans have suffered during the recent recession that the Wall Street Banks helped cause, Clinton has accepted millions of dollars from them in exchange for giving a few speeches” and that “Clinton is willing to sacrifice fairness and equality to achieve her own goals” (for full text, see Appendix A). The loyalty argument was accompanied by a picture showing Hillary Clinton next to an open envelope with an email symbol inside. The fairness argument was accompanied by a picture showing Hillary Clinton next to a Wall Street sign.

Following the campaign message, participants were asked to summarize the message they just read. As in Study 1, two raters coded whether participants' answers to the attention check indicated that the participants actually read the arguments. The inter-rater reliability was high ($\phi = .89$). We excluded only those participants for which both coders rated the summary as inadequate⁵. Afterwards, they completed the same three measures that were used in Study 1 regarding Hillary Clinton (warmth, acceptance as president, likelihood to vote). At the end of the study, participants completed a demographic questionnaire which included the same measure of political ideology as used in Study 1.

⁵ As in Study 1, the results were robust for different exclusion procedures. Not excluding participants due to the attention check (final $n = 405$) did not change the results substantively except for the following differences. For warmth, the interaction effect became non-significant. For acceptance as president, the effect of condition for conservatives became marginally significant. Excluding participants whose summaries were judged as inadequate by at least one rater (final $n = 389$) did not change the results substantively except for the following difference. For warmth, the interaction effect became significant.

Analysis strategy. We used the same analysis strategy as in Study 1 except that this time the loyalty condition was used as reference category for the moral argument manipulation⁶.

Results

Warmth. Means and standard deviations for each condition by ideology group are presented in Table 2a. The regression analysis showed a marginally significant interaction effect, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $F(2, 386) = 2.43$, $p = .090$.⁷ Simple-slopes analyses indicated that, as expected, liberal participants perceived Clinton as less warm in the fairness argument condition than in the loyalty argument condition, $b = -12.55$, $t(386) = -3.06$, $p = .002$, 95 % CI = [-20.61, -4.49]. There was no significant effect of the moral argument condition for either moderates, $b = -2.00$, $t(386) = -0.45$, $p = .653$, 95 % CI = [-10.76, 6.75], or conservatives, $b = 1.52$, $t(386) = 0.25$, $p = .805$, 95 % CI = [-10.57, 13.61].

Acceptance as president. Means and standard deviations for each condition by ideology group are presented in Table 2b. The interaction effect was not significant, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $F(2, 386) = 1.83$, $p = .162$. In addition, simple effects analysis did not provide support for our hypothesis: Liberals in the fairness argument condition did not accept Clinton significantly less as president than liberals in the loyalty argument condition, $b = -0.12$, $t(386) = -0.02$, $p = .981$, 95 % CI = [-9.74, 9.51]. Additionally, there was no significant effect of the moral argument condition for

⁶ As an inspection of a plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values indicated that the assumption of homoscedasticity might be violated, we reran the analyses with heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors. The results did not change substantively.

⁷ Treating ideology as a continuous moderator leads to significant interaction effects in the predicted direction for warmth ($p < .05$), and two interaction effects close to significance for acceptance as president and likelihood to vote ($ps < .14$).

moderates, $b = -0.33$, $t(386) = -0.06$, $p = .950$, 95 % CI = [-10.79, 10.12], but there was some evidence that conservatives in the fairness argument condition accepted Clinton more as president than conservatives in the loyalty argument condition, $b = 15.42$, $t(386) = 2.10$, $p = .036$, 95 % CI = [0.98, 29.87].

Likelihood to vote for Clinton. Means and standard deviations for each condition by ideology group are presented in Table 2c. The interaction effect was not significant, $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$, $F(2, 386) = 1.27$, $p = .282$. However, simple-slopes analyses indicated that, as expected, liberal participants were less likely to vote for Clinton in the fairness argument condition than in the loyalty argument condition, $b = -12.72$, $t(386) = -2.36$, $p = .019$, 95 % CI = [-23.32, -2.11]. There was no significant effect of condition for either moderates, $b = -2.32$, $t(386) = -0.40$, $p = .692$, 95 % CI = [-13.83, 9.20], or conservatives, $b = 0.29$, $t(386) = 0.04$, $p = .971$, 95 % CI = [-15.62, 16.20]. These findings are illustrated in Figure 2.

Moderated mediation analyses. The results of the moderated mediation analysis were consistent with our hypotheses. For liberals, the effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Clinton was mediated by warmth, $b = -10.80$, $SE = 3.76$, 95 % CI = [-18.36, -3.84], but not by acceptance as president, $b = -0.02$, $SE = 1.00$, 95 % CI = [-2.18, 1.84], and the direct effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Clinton was not significant for liberals, $b = -1.89$, $t(384) = -0.53$, $p = .596$, 95 % CI = [-8.90, 5.12]. For moderates, there was no indirect effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Clinton, for warmth: $b = -1.73$, $SE = 4.03$, 95 % CI = [-9.74, 6.20], or for acceptance as president: $b = -0.06$, $SE = 1.09$, 95 % CI = [-2.14, 2.31], and the direct effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Clinton was not significant for moderates, $b = -0.53$, $t(384) = -0.14$, $p = .890$, 95 % CI = [-8.02, 6.96]. For conservatives, there was an unexpected indirect effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Clinton via acceptance as president, $b = 2.99$, $SE = 1.51$, 95 % CI = [0.72,

6.85], but not for warmth: $b = 1.31$, $SE = 4.37$, 95 % CI = [-7.21, 10.05]. The direct effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Clinton was not significant for conservatives, $b = -4.01$, $t(384) = -0.76$, $p = .450$, 95 % CI = [-14.43, 6.41].

Discussion

The current results complement the findings from Study 1, demonstrating that morally reframed messages can be an effective strategy for persuading not just conservative, but also liberal targets. We found causal evidence that, compared to arguing in opposition to Hillary Clinton on loyalty issues, opposing her on the more liberal concern of fairness led liberal participants to feel colder towards her and, most importantly, to be less likely to vote for her. The effect of experimental condition on the likelihood to vote for Clinton for liberals was mediated by perceived warmth. We did not find evidence that the moral argument condition affected the support of moderates for Hillary Clinton, but we did find that conservatives in the loyalty condition accepted Clinton less as president than conservatives in the fairness condition. Further, there was an indirect effect of experimental condition on likelihood to vote for Clinton via acceptance as president. These effects for conservatives, though not directly hypothesized, are in the direction predicted by a moral reframing account, such that conservatives were more persuaded by appeals grounded in the more conservative moral foundation of loyalty.

General Discussion

Across two studies using the two major candidates from the 2016 US presidential election as targets, we found consistent evidence that moral reframing can be an effective strategy for persuading the electorate about political candidates. Specifically, arguments in opposition to Hillary Clinton were more effective in influencing liberals when they were framed in fairness values as compared to when they were framed in loyalty values, and arguments in opposition to Donald Trump were more persuasive to conservatives when they were framed in loyalty values

as compared to a fairness framing. In addition, we found evidence suggesting that the increased persuasiveness of the morally reframed messages on voting intentions was mediated by the attitudes towards the candidate (feelings of warmth and/or acceptance of the candidate as president). As such, the present inquiry extends past research on moral reframing in important ways. While it has been shown that moral reframing can increase the support of liberals and conservatives for policies that they would usually oppose (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015), the present research provides the first evidence that moral reframing is also an effective strategy to decrease the attachment of liberals and conservatives to the political candidate of the party they typically support (i.e., Democrats and Republicans, respectively).

Furthermore, the current findings illustrate that despite the fundamental moral differences separating liberals and conservatives (Caprara et al., 2006; Graham et al., 2009; Jost et al., 2003; Lakoff 2002; Thorisdottir et al., 2007), there are ways that people across the ideological spectrum can make their stance understandable to a person from the other side. While much research has outlined the enormous difficulties involved in fostering productive conversations and collaborations between liberals and conservatives (e.g., Brandt, Reyna, Chamber, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014; Toner, Leary, Asher, & Jongman-Sereno, 2013), the current research highlights a technique where supporters of political candidates are responsive to criticism about their favored candidate, and as a result, decreases the distance between liberals and conservatives.

The effectiveness of moral reframing raises the question of whether campaigns, pundits, and everyday people actually employ this technique to affect people's opinion about political candidates. In a first attempt to investigate this question, we asked conservative participants to create an argument to convince liberals of why they should oppose Hillary Clinton, and we asked liberal participants to craft arguments to convince conservatives as to why they should oppose Donald Trump. In addition, we investigated the content of a collection of YouTube videos

opposing Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. We predicted that both conservative and liberals would use arguments that appeal to their own values rather than the values of their target group (cf. Feinberg & Willer, 2015).

However, we found that the usage of moral reframing differed strongly between liberals and conservatives. In line with our expectation, both liberal participants and YouTube videos opposing Donald Trump used the two more liberal moral foundations (harm, fairness) more often than the three more conservative moral foundations (loyalty, authority, sanctity). In contrast, although the conservative participants and YouTube videos opposing Hillary Clinton did rely heavily on loyalty concerns, they also appealed to the two liberal moral foundations of fairness and harm to a strong degree. These initial results may suggest that conservatives might be better at making reframed arguments than liberals, and that liberal advocates could potentially fair better if they incorporated more arguments relating to the more conservative moral dimensions, especially the authority and purity foundations which we found they almost never used – a notion also suggested by Haidt (2012). Note, however, that this evidence should be viewed as only preliminary and fodder for future research. More information about these analyses can be found in Appendix B.

Overall, the present research had several important limitations. For instance, although we found support for the effectiveness of moral reframing with regard to both attitudes towards the candidates and behavioral intentions, we did not use measures of real behavior. Recent research has found that moral reframing used in the context of environmental protection was effective in influencing the amount of money participants donated to an environmental defense fund (Wolsko et al., 2016). Incorporating a similar behavioral measure for gauging support for a candidate, or potentially tracking participants' actual voting behavior after exposure to reframed messages would be a promising route for future research. Additionally, in the present research we did not

have control conditions, and therefore it is impossible to know for sure which of the two conditions in the studies caused the persuasion effects we found. However, past research has used control conditions and found that the effect is in line with the moral reframing hypothesis (Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015), and as such, we feel confident that the effects we found were due to the morally reframed conditions.

As the current paper illustrates, research on moral reframing can be extended to new areas of inquiry. One particularly interesting avenue for future research could be to investigate the usage and effectiveness of moral reframing in everyday life to prevent and overcome interpersonal disputes and conflicts between liberals and conservatives. Just as for policies and political candidates, moral reframing could be used to introduce one's new liberal partner in a more favorable light to one's conservative parents.

Overall, our findings add to the growing body of research demonstrating how important it is to recognize and understand the moral values of those who take an opposing political position, (Day et al., 2014; Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015; Kidwell et al., 2013; Wolsko et al., 2016). As a whole, this literature highlights that the more individuals take the moral perspective of those who do not agree with them into consideration, the more successful they will be at reaching those individuals. The present research demonstrates that this is even the case in the context of one of the most politically polarizing events – political campaigns.

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Table 1

Results of Study 1: Means (Standard Deviations, n) for Experimental Conditions x Ideology

a) Warmth

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Fairness Argument	61.04 (31.56, 45)	31.87 (30.50, 67)	5.10 (12.63, 83)
Loyalty Argument	47.23 (32.65, 40)	30.44 (30.54, 75)	8.00 (14.86, 87)

b) Acceptance as President

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Fairness Argument	65.84 (32.94, 45)	34.55 (34.00, 67)	11.51 (25.53, 83)
Loyalty Argument	50.45 (36.74, 40)	35.68 (34.77, 75)	18.60 (31.49, 87)

Note. The measure was recoded so that higher values indicate that participants were more willing to accept Trump as president.

c) Likelihood to Vote

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Fairness Argument	74.62 (31.72, 45)	31.58 (37.56, 67)	2.06 (8.88, 83)
Loyalty Argument	55.75 (39.82, 40)	31.13 (38.31, 75)	7.71 (19.64, 87)

Table 2

Results of Study 2: Means (Standard Deviations, n) for Experimental Conditions x Ideology

a) Warmth

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Fairness Argument	10.59 (23.21, 37)	27.45 (28.10, 74)	42.04 (27.17, 84)
Loyalty Argument	9.08 (20.61, 39)	29.45 (29.03, 71)	54.59 (27.24, 87)

b) Acceptance as President

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Fairness Argument	25.73 (37.81, 37)	34.92 (32.26, 74)	60.95 (30.80, 84)
Loyalty Argument	10.31 (19.42, 39)	35.25 (33.16, 71)	61.07 (33.77, 87)

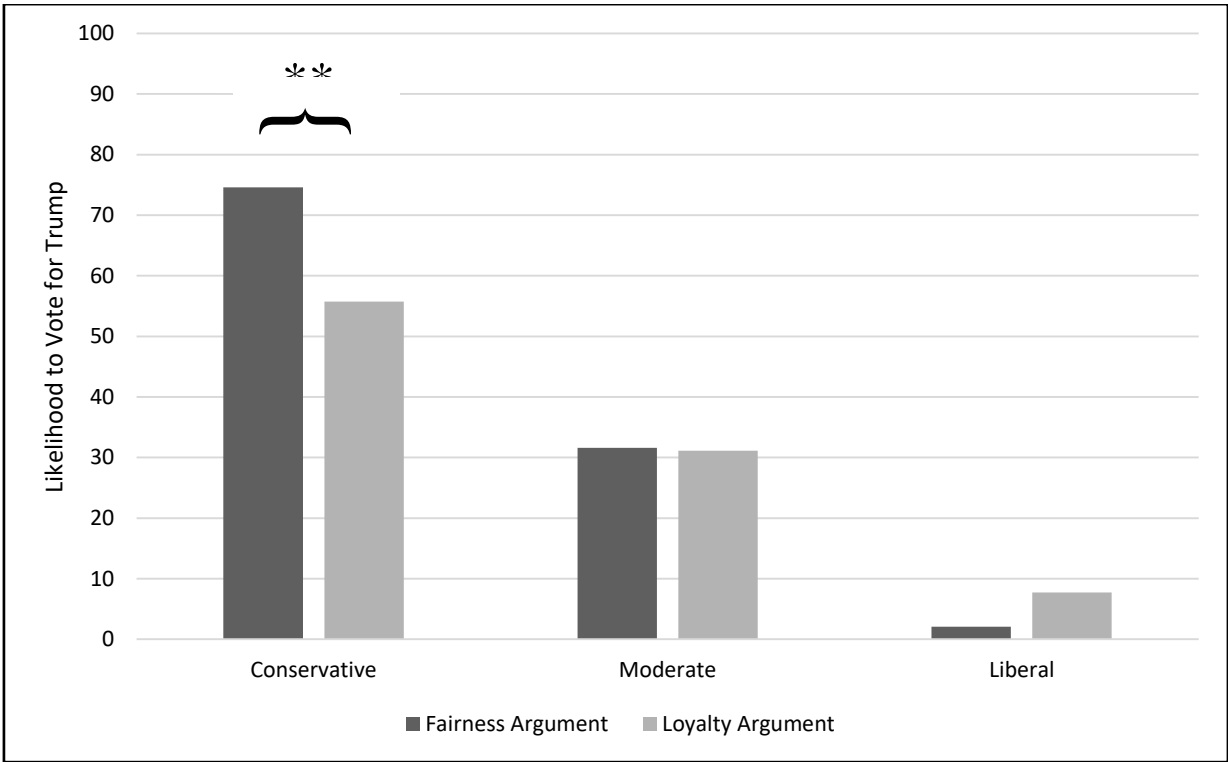
Note. The measure was recoded so that higher values indicate that participants were more willing to accept Clinton as president.

c) Likelihood to Vote

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Ideology</i>		
	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Fairness Argument	10.70 (26.50, 37)	33.88 (38.81, 74)	63.26 (38.32, 84)
Loyalty Argument	10.41 (24.87, 39)	36.20 (40.71, 71)	75.98 (31.11, 87)

Figure 1

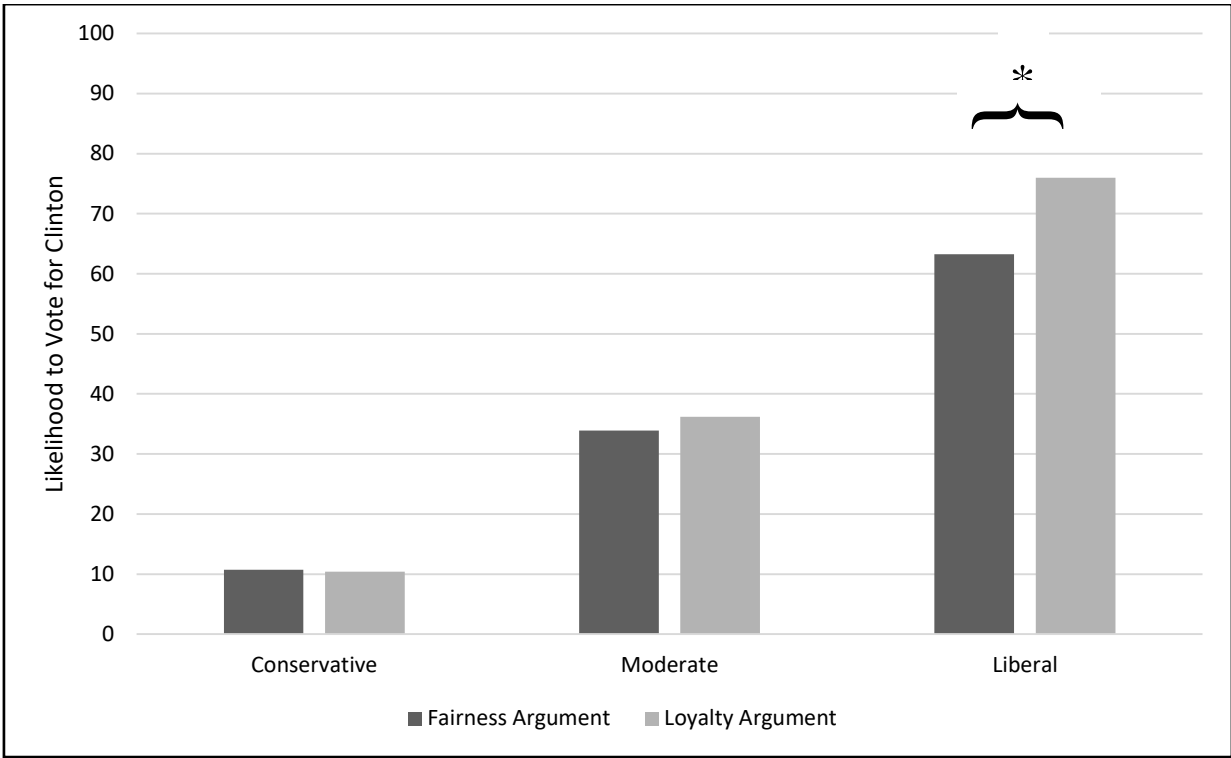
Likelihood to Vote for Trump Dependent on Participants' Ideology and Argument Condition



Notes. *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$.

Figure 2

Likelihood to Vote for Clinton Dependent on Participants' Ideology and Argument Condition



Notes. *: $p < .05$, **: $p < .01$.

Appendix A

Arguments used in Studies 1-2

Study 1

Fairness argument

Donald Trump Discriminates Against Muslims

Donald Trump openly discriminates against Muslims threatening their rights to be treated with fairness and equality. He has suggested to temporarily ban Muslims from certain countries from entering the United States and his unfair statements are a breeding ground for prejudice towards Muslims. His unfair actions exclude Muslims from their chance to become part of American society.

No matter what your political position, Donald Trump's discrimination of foreigners based on their religious beliefs is unacceptable.

Loyalty argument

Trump First, America Second

Donald Trump has repeatedly behaved disloyally towards our country to serve his own interests. For instance, during the Vietnam War, he dodged the draft to follow his father into the development business. Recently, he encouraged Russian agents to commit espionage against the US to find information that could help him to win the presidential election.

No matter what your political position, Donald Trump's disloyalty towards the United States to serve his own interests is unacceptable.

Study 2

Fairness argument

Hillary *First*, Fairness *Second*

Hillary Clinton has taken advantage of unfair support throughout her political career. While so many Americans have suffered during the recent recession that the Wall Street Banks helped cause, Clinton has accepted millions of dollars from them in exchange for giving a few speeches. And, even though Clinton claims to be a strong advocate for gender equality, her actions do not always demonstrate this. For example, in her own foundation, male executives earn 38% more than female executives! Also, the Clinton Foundation has received millions of dollars from Saudi Arabia, even though it is well-known that women in Saudi Arabia⁸ are treated like property -- they cannot choose the clothes they wear, play sports, or even drive a car without risking persecution.

No matter what your political position, it is clear that Hillary Clinton is willing to sacrifice fairness and equality to achieve her own goals.

Loyalty argument

Hillary *First*, America *Second*

Hillary Clinton has failed to perform her civic duty and, as a result, has put America's standing in the world in jeopardy. During her time as the Secretary of State, she failed our ambassador and soldiers in Benghazi, resulting in terrorists taking over America's consulate. She used her private email server for official communications making them highly vulnerable to hackers from places

⁸ The argument included a small spelling mistake. Instead of "Saudia Arabia" it should have been "Saudi Arabia".

like Russia and China, who may have stolen American secrets right from under our noses.

Furthermore, although 19 of the 21 Sept 11th hijackers were from Saudi Arabia⁶, Clinton supported the sale of 80 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia, which have since been used in a war that allowed al Qaeda to seize more territory.

No matter what your political position, it is clear that Hillary Clinton is willing to risk the standing of our nation to achieve her own goals.

Appendix B

Usage of Moral Reframing

Laypeople's arguments opposing Donald Trump

Participants. One hundred and seventy-six liberals recruited from the Amazon Mechanical Turk website who indicated that they opposed Donald Trump more than Hillary Clinton completed the study.

Procedure. Participants learned that this study was about creating a message about a presidential candidate. Next, they filled out two filter questions. First, they indicated which of the two presidential candidates (Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton) they opposed more. Second, they filled out the same measure of political ideology as in Studies 1 and 2. Only liberals who opposed Donald Trump more strongly were filtered into this study.

Next, participants were asked to write a persuasive argument “aimed at convincing conservative Americans who support Donald Trump for president why they should oppose Donald Trump”. Participants were further instructed not to write about the advantages of other candidates but rather to focus on a critique of Donald Trump. They were also motivated by a bonus of \$50 for the best persuasive argument. Afterwards, participants completed the same measures of attitudes towards Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton as in Studies 1 and 2 (warmth, acceptance as president, and likelihood to vote) and a small demographic questionnaire.

Codings. Five research assistants (blind to the hypotheses) coded each of the arguments on (a) to what extent the argument appealed to the moral values related to each of the five moral

foundation and (b) to what extent the argument attacked the moral values related to each of the five moral foundations. All codings were on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a whole lot)⁹.

The reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was low to medium for the appealing ratings ($.38 < \alpha < .61$), except for the authority/subversion dimension ($\alpha = .11$). The reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was very low for the attacking ratings ($-.03 < \alpha < .17$). Therefore, we focused on the appealing ratings in the remaining discussion of this study. We averaged the appealing scores of the five raters for each of the five moral foundation so that we had five dependent variables: the extent to which arguments criticizing Donald Trump appealed to a) care/harm values, b) fairness/cheating values, c) loyalty/betrayal values, d) authority/subversion values, e) sanctity/degradation values.

Analysis strategy. We conducted a repeated measures ANOVA with moral foundation (care/harm values vs. fairness/cheating values vs. loyalty/betrayal values vs. authority/subversion values vs. sanctity/degradation values) as within-subjects factor. We used the Greenhouse-Geister correction for violations of sphericity.

Results. Our hypothesis that liberals would use the two liberal foundations (individualizing foundations) rather than the three conservative foundations (binding foundations) to convince conservatives to oppose Donald Trump was supported. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect for moral foundation, $F(3.40, 594.84) = 184.52, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .51$. Liberal participants used the individualizing foundations more often than the binding foundations. Specifically, the care/harm foundations was used significantly more than the fairness/cheating foundation, $F(1, 175) = 20.53, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. In turn, the

⁹ One coder accidentally coded on a scale from 0 to 5. We recoded these ratings using the following formula ($\text{Old_Coding}/5*4 + 1$) so that the codings were also between 1 and 5.

fairness/cheating foundation was used significantly more than the loyalty/betrayal foundation, $F(1, 175) = 8.04, p = .005$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. The loyalty/betrayal foundation was used significantly more than the authority/subversion foundation, $F(1, 175) = 27.70, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$. The authority/subversion foundation was used significantly more than the sanctity/degradation foundation, $F(1, 175) = 241.73, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .58$. In short, liberal participants used the two individualizing foundations significantly more often to convince conservatives to oppose Donald Trump than the three binding foundations.

Laypeople's arguments opposing Hillary Clinton

Participants. One hundred and six conservatives recruited from the Amazon Mechanical Turk website who indicated that they opposed Hillary Clinton more than Donald Trump completed the study. As two arguments were consistently judged as arguments that do not oppose Hillary Clinton by five research assistants, these two cases were excluded and the final sample size consisted of 104 arguments.

Procedure. The procedure was the same for the arguments opposing Donald Trump except that this time only conservatives who opposed Hillary Clinton more strongly were filtered into the study. Furthermore, the argument participants were asked to create was aimed at convincing liberal participants of why they should oppose Hillary Clinton.

Codings. The coding procedure was identical to the coding procedure for the arguments opposing Donald Trump.

Again, the reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was low to medium for the appealing ratings ($.35 < \alpha < .63$). The reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was very low for the attacking ratings ($-.03 < \alpha < .13$). Therefore, we focused on the appealing ratings in the remaining discussion of this study.

Analysis strategy. We used the same analysis strategy as above.

Results. Our hypothesis that conservatives would use the binding foundations rather than the individualizing foundations to convince liberals to oppose Hillary Clinton was not supported. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect for moral foundation, $F(3.53, 364.09) = 139.96, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .58$. Conservative participants did not use the binding foundations more often than the individualizing foundations. Specifically, the fairness/cheating foundations was used significantly more than the loyalty/betrayal foundation, $F(1, 103) = 28.45, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .22$. The loyalty/betrayal foundation was used to a similar amount as the care/harm foundation, $F(1, 103) = 2.21, p = .140, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$. The care/harm foundation was used significantly more than the authority/subversion foundation, $F(1, 103) = 54.80, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .35$. The authority/subversion foundation was used significantly more than the sanctity/degradation foundation, $F(1, 103) = 94.22, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .48$. In short, conservative participants mostly used the two individualizing foundations and the loyalty/betrayal foundation to convince liberals to oppose Hillary Clinton.

YouTube videos opposing Donald Trump

Sample. We searched for videos on youtube.com with the following terms "Hillary Clinton Donald Trump ad", "Donald Trump Hillary Clinton ad", "Donald Trump ad", and "Hillary Clinton ad." We only included videos that were no longer than two minutes and had at least 10 000 views (on September 7, 2016). Then we asked two research assistants (blind to the hypotheses) to code all videos that matched these criteria on whether these videos were professionally made, whether the ad was a critique or praise for one of the two candidates, who was the target of the ad, and who was the source of the ad. Videos that were professionally made, were critique ads, and had only Donald Trump as target constituted the sample size for Study 3 ($n = 62$). However, seven of these videos had to be removed as they were deleted from youtube.com

before the coding procedure started. So, the final sample size for this study consisted of 55 videos.

Codings. The coding procedure was identical to the procedure described above.

Again, the reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was low to medium for the appealing ratings ($.33 < \alpha_s < .71$). The reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was very low for the attacking ratings ($-.07 < \alpha_s < .17$). Therefore, we focused on the appealing ratings in the remaining discussion of this study.

Analysis strategy. We used the same analysis strategy as above.

Results. Our hypothesis that the campaigns in the video would use the individualizing foundations rather than the binding foundations to criticize Donald Trump was supported. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect for moral foundation, $F(3.52, 190.33) = 23.00, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .30$. There was no significant difference between the most-often used care/harm foundation and the second most-often used fairness/cheating foundation, $F(1, 54) = 0.25, p = .622$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$, as well as between the fairness/cheating foundation and the third most often used loyalty/betrayal foundation, $F(1, 54) = 0.35, p = .554$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. However, the loyalty/betrayal foundation was used significantly more than the authority/subversion foundation, $F(1, 54) = 6.82, p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$. The authority/subversion foundation was used significantly more than the sanctity/degradation foundation, $F(1, 54) = 32.93, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .38$. In short, YouTube videos that opposed Donald Trump were mostly based on the two individualizing foundations, to a slightly lower extent on the loyalty/betrayal foundation, and to a much lower extent on the two other binding foundations.

YouTube Videos opposing Hillary Clinton

Sample. We used the same search strategy as above, but included only videos that had only Hillary Clinton as target ($n = 54$). However, one of these videos had to be removed from youtube.com as it was deleted before at least three coders could code it. So, the final sample size for this study consisted of 53 videos.

Codings. The coding procedure was identical to the procedure used above.

Again, the reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was low to medium for the appealing ratings ($.33 < \alpha_s < .76$). The reliability of the ratings of the research assistants was partly very low for the attacking ratings ($-.03 < \alpha_s < .61$). Therefore, we focused on the appealing ratings in the remaining discussion of this study.

Analysis strategy. We used the same analysis strategy as above.

Results. Our hypothesis that the campaigns in the video would use the binding foundations rather than the individualizing foundations to criticize Hillary Clinton was partly supported. The repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant main effect for moral foundation, $F(2.53, 131.36) = 40.03, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .43$. The loyalty/betrayal foundation was used most often, but the difference to the second most often used fairness/cheating foundation was not significant, $F(1, 52) = 0.62, p = .436$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. However, the difference between the loyalty/betrayal foundation and the third most often used care/harm foundation was significant, $F(1, 52) = 4.32, p = .043$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. The difference between the fairness/cheating foundation and the care/harm foundation was not significant, $F(1, 52) = 0.49, p = .489$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. Further, the care/harm foundation was used significantly more than the authority/subversion foundation, $F(1, 52) = 41.17, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .44$. The authority/subversion foundation was used significantly more than the sanctity/degradation foundation, $F(1, 52) = 24.15, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .32$. In short, YouTube videos that opposed

Hillary Clinton were mostly based on the loyalty/betrayal foundation and the two individualizing foundations, but to a much lower extent on the two other binding foundations.