

## **Moral Conviction and Political Engagement**

**Linda J. Skitka**

*University of Illinois at Chicago*

**Christopher W. Bauman**

*Northwestern University*

---

*The 2004 presidential election led to considerable discussion about whether moral values motivated people to vote, and if so, whether it led to a conservative electoral advantage. The results of two studies—one conducted in the context of the 2000 presidential election, the other in the context of the 2004 presidential election—indicated that stronger moral convictions associated with candidates themselves and attitudes on issues of the day uniquely predicted self-reported voting behavior and intentions to vote even when controlling for a host of alternative explanations (e.g., attitude strength, strength of party identification). In addition, we found strong support for the hypothesis that moral convictions equally motivated political engagement for those on the political right and left and little support for the notion that a combination of morality and politics is something more characteristic of the political right than it is of the political left.*

---

**KEY WORDS:** Moral conviction, moral values, electoral politics, political engagement, political participation

The 2004 presidential election brought the potential importance of “moral values” into the spotlight. Results of exit polls indicated that a plurality of voters selected moral values as what mattered most in deciding how they voted in the election relative to other choice alternatives.<sup>1</sup> Even more provocative was the finding that of those who mentioned moral values, 80% voted for President Bush (Media Matters, 2004). Media commentators and pundits were quick to get excited about these findings. For example, Dan Rather (CBS anchor) reported: “moral values—we’ll give you a look at the surprise issue that trumped the war, terror, and

<sup>1</sup> The 2004 exit poll was conducted by Edison/Mitofsky for the National Election Pool (ABC, AP, CBS, CNN, Fox News, and NBC).

the economy as the decisive issue in the election!” (CBS Evening News, 11/3/04). However, almost as fast as the moral values news story spread, it began to be discredited. It quickly became apparent that the exit poll question that led to the conclusion that moral values played an important role in the election was potentially biased (e.g., Langer, 2004, Langer & Cohen, 2005; cf. Schuman, 2006). People were asked which of several factors influenced their vote, and among other problems, all the other response options were narrower than the moral values category (e.g., taxes, the Iraq War). In short, people may have selected the moral values response option because it was broader and more inclusive than the other response alternatives they were offered.

Despite the potential flaws in the controversial exit poll question, the notion that moral values might be important motivators of political engagement in general, and of voting in particular, captured both the popular and academic mind. Some researchers responded by trying to study the role that moral values played in the election by using less biased measures in other poll data. For example, Hillygus and Shields (2005) concluded that attitudes about the Iraq War and the economy (presumed nonmoral attitudes) were more important in shaping candidate preferences and voting behavior in the 2004 election than attitudes on abortion or gay marriage (presumed moral attitudes).

Although Hillygus and Shields (2005) painted a less moralized portrait of people’s motives in the 2004 election than did others who based their conclusions on the exit poll data, their research did not provide a very strong test of the moral values hypothesis for at least two reasons. First, even though one could reasonably argue that attitudes about the Iraq War and the economy were less likely to be rooted in moral concerns than attitudes about abortion or gay marriage, there is no way to be sure without actually asking people about whether their attitudes on these issues are or are not reflections of their core moral beliefs. Some people may support or oppose abortion or gay marriage for nonmoral reasons; for instance, they might support abortion because it provides a safety net to guard against unwanted pregnancy and not because they feel any particular moral connection to protecting women’s autonomy. Similarly, people might oppose abortion because church authorities say they should, without necessarily having any deep personal or moral feeling about the issue themselves. Conversely, some people might support or oppose the Iraq War because of deep moral concerns about the oppression of the Iraqi people under Saddam Hussein, or because they see a military response in the absence of an attack or explicit provocation as morally suspect.

Second, assumed moral attitudes might differ from assumed nonmoral attitudes for reasons other than their potential associations with morality. For example, the issues selected as representing “moral” issues might also be especially partisan ones, or ones that people feel especially strongly about, but not ones necessarily seen in a moral light. In short, it is impossible to attribute the source of different consequences of specific attitudes (e.g., abortion vs. the Iraq War) to

differences in moral sentiment without measuring the extent to which people see these specific attitudes as reflecting their moral beliefs.

Taken together, the jury would appear to be still out on whether moral convictions played an important role in political participation and choice in the 2004 (or any other) election. Results may have reflected something about morality, but also may have represented nonmoral preferences, partisanship, or some other unmeasured variable instead. The goal of the research that will be presented in this article was therefore to explicitly test hypotheses prompted by the 2004 exit poll findings with greater scientific rigor. Specifically, we tested the following questions: (a) do attitudes held with moral conviction play a special role in motivating political engagement, such as turning out at the polls, that cannot be explained by other relevant variables, such as attitude extremity or partisanship, and (b) to the extent that moral convictions about issues of the day or specific candidates do influence intentions to vote or voter turnout, does it advantage conservative candidates or does it serve as an equal opportunity motivator of political engagement for those on both the political right and left?

Before turning to the specifics of the research conducted here, we briefly review theory and research that informs each of the questions noted above. Specifically, we explore why moral conviction might be an especially motivating property of attitudes, as well as theory and research consistent with the conservative advantage and equal opportunity motivator hypotheses.

### **Moral Conviction**

Moral conviction refers to a strong and absolute belief that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral (e.g., Skitka & Mullen, 2002). People in all cultures possess these beliefs, although the objects of moral conviction may be culturally or contextually variable (Shweder, 2002). Moral mandates are strong attitudes (that is, attitudes that are more extreme, important, certain, and central; see Krosnick & Petty, 1995) that are also held with strong moral conviction (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). The basic premise of the moral mandate program of research is that attitude content, in addition to attitude structure, may be important to consider when predicting behavior. People's feelings about various sports teams, their musical tastes, or even their relative preference for Mac versus PC operating systems could each easily be experienced as strong attitudes (extreme, certain, etc.), but would rarely be experienced as moral. People's feelings about infanticide, female circumcision, abortion, or a host of political issues (gay marriage, the Iraq War, the Patriot Act), however, could be experienced as both strong and moral. We propose that when people perceive an issue in a moral light, it is more likely to impact behavior than when attitudes are perceived as strong but nonmoral. In short, our contention is that the distinction between strong preferences and moral imperatives is an important but neglected one in attitude theory and research.

More specifically, by integrating theories of moral philosophy, development, and attitudes we recently outlined a number of ways that attitudes held with strong moral convictions theoretically differ from equally strong, but nonmoral attitudes (Skitka et al., 2005). We theorized that moral convictions, unlike equally strong but nonmoral attitudes, are *sui generis*, that is, people perceive them to be unique, special, and in a class of their own (e.g., Boyd, 1988). Part of what makes moral convictions special is that they represent a Humean paradox (see Mackie, 1977; Smith, 1994, for detailed discussions). On the one hand, moral convictions are experienced as nonarbitrary knowledge about the world, or recognitions of fact. On the other hand, moral convictions act as motivational guides. The paradox is that recognitions of fact are generally presumed to be independent from any kind of motivational force (Hume, 1888). For example, recognition that the earth is round or that plant growth involves photosynthesis has no motivational corollary or mandate (Shweder, 2002). In contrast, the judgment that female circumcision is a fundamentally moral or immoral practice has an inherent motivational quality to it—one is motivated to either fully embrace or reject this practice and those who engage in it as a function of one's moral beliefs about whether the practice is right or wrong. Moreover, moral convictions provide their own justification for response or action. One need not explain why one rejects the practice of infanticide, for example, beyond saying that one believes it to be wrong. In summary, moral convictions, unlike otherwise strong but nonmoral attitudes, are experienced as a unique combination of factual belief, compelling motive, and justification for action.

In addition to the factual, motivational, and justificatory properties of moral conviction, philosophical definitions of morality and theories of moral development often include universality and generalizability as distinguishing features of moral as compared to nonmoral beliefs (Hare, 1981; Kant, 1786). For example, domain theory posits that universality is one characteristic that distinguishes moral convictions from personal tastes or normative conventions (e.g., Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 1983). Personal tastes, such as an aesthetic preference for smooth versus natural female genitalia, are by definition subjective. Other people are free to disagree or have alternative tastes or preferences. Other attitudes reflect normative conventions. For example, someone might see female circumcision as wrong because it is against the law where they happen to live, but see it as perfectly acceptable in other parts of the world, where it is a normative practice in both culture and law. In contrast, one has a moral stance on female circumcision when it is rooted in beliefs about moral truth—an absolute sense of right and wrong that transcends normative conventions, local law, or cultural context.

Another distinguishing feature of moral convictions is that they appear to have different ties with emotion than do otherwise strong but nonmoral attitudes. If one strongly prefers Mac to PC operating systems, one is unlikely to become incensed or outraged witnessing someone else firing up Windows or Vista. However, if one is morally opposed to the practice of infanticide, one is likely to be horrified

witnessing someone else engaging in this behavior. Moreover, shame, guilt, and regret at personally failing to behave consistently with one's moral convictions are each likely to exceed the shame, guilt, and regret for failing to behave consistently with one's subjective preferences or sense of normative convention.

In sum, there are numerous theoretical reasons to believe that attitudes held with moral conviction are likely to be stronger predictors of behavior than their nonmoral cousins. Testing hypotheses about the power of moral conviction to predict behavior seems especially interesting to pursue in the context of politics and political engagement. Politics, after all, represent a moral contest, that is, a competition between conflicting views of what is morally most desirable, what the moral priorities of a community or a society should be, and how these moral priorities are best achieved (Emler, 2002).

### *The Current Studies*

Given that Skitka et al. (2005) found that moral conviction had important implications for people's feelings of attraction and repulsion toward others in nonelectoral contexts, an interesting next step would be to explore whether these effects also emerge in the context of electoral politics. If moral convictions associated with attitudes on issues of the day and about candidates themselves are indeed more motivating than equally strong preferences or conventions, then they should uniquely predict intentions to vote as well as actual voting behavior. In short, in addition to expanding research on moral conviction to an important applied domain, the present research also allows for a test of a core premise of Skitka et al.'s (2005) working theory of moral mandates. Does knowing whether someone's attitude is a moral conviction yield unique explained variance in behavior, specifically in people's reported intentions and actually turning out at the polls?

Another intriguing aspect of the 2004 exit poll was the finding that Bush supporters were so much more likely than Kerry supporters to endorse "moral values" as the reason for voting for the candidate they did in the 2004 presidential election. We turn next to consider whether there are theoretical or empirical reasons to expect that political liberals and conservatives are likely to vary in the degree that they see issues of the day or their candidate preferences as tied to moral convictions.

### *The Conservative Advantage Hypothesis*

To the dismay of many on the political left, the Republican Party appears to have successfully branded itself as the party of moral values in the United States (Frank, 2004; Lakoff, 2002). Few were surprised when the results of the 2004 presidential election exit polls revealed that Republicans were more likely than Democrats to report that moral values were what mattered most in deciding how

they voted in the 2004 election, even if the magnitude of this difference was larger than might be expected. At least at the level of popular culture, the idea that a connection between strength of moral conviction and voting behavior would advantage conservative candidates was a credible one.

Consistent with the notion that the connection of moral convictions to political engagement might lead to a conservative electoral advantage is evidence that those on the left and right are differentially likely to see issues as moral absolutes. Liberals are more likely to endorse moral relativism (i.e., the idea that conceptions of “right” and “wrong” are culturally variable and that this cultural variability is also acceptable) whereas conservatives are stronger moral absolutists (“right” and “wrong” are not culturally variable nor should they be; e.g., Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Van Kenhove, Vermeir, & Verniers, 2001).

In a similar vein, other research has found systematic connections between levels of moral reasoning and political attitudes. Specifically, there are strong and well-replicated associations of conventional and postconventional moral reasoning with, respectively, political conservatism and liberalism (e.g., Emler, Renwick, & Malone, 1983; Thoma, Narvaez, Rest, & Derryberry, 1999). One major distinction between conventional and postconventional moral reasoning is a shift from moral absolutism to moral relativism (Kohlberg, 1969). Given the universalism premise of our working theory of what distinguishes moral convictions from otherwise strong but nonmoral attitudes, these results suggest that political liberals may be less likely than conservatives to have strong moral convictions. However, one could also interpret these findings to mean that liberals and conservatives may have equally strong moral convictions, but define right and wrong, moral and immoral in different ways. We turn to this notion next.

### *The Equal Opportunity Motivator Hypothesis*

The equal opportunity motivator hypothesis is that people on both the political right and left are likely to be similarly motivated by moral considerations. Consistent with this idea, Lakoff (2002) recently advanced the argument that liberals’ and conservatives’ political attitudes are equally rooted in moral sensibilities. He argues that liberals and conservatives, however, have different conceptions of what constitutes ultimate moral good or evil. Lakoff claims that conservatives’ sense of morality can be explained by the internalization of a “strict father” model of the family. This model takes as given that life is difficult, that the world is a fundamentally dangerous place, and that people can best be taught how to cope with these dangers and difficulties by the rigorous application of rewards and punishments. The strict father mentality leads people to a focus on self-reliance, moral strength, and resistance of evil as ultimate goods. In contrast, liberals’ sense of morality can be explained by the internalization of the “nurturant parent” model of the family. According to this model, happiness and fulfillment are seen as within reach, and a fulfilling life is to a significant degree defined as an empathetic and

nurturant one. This family system is based less on rewards and punishments, and more on attachment and care. These different family systems lead conservatives and liberals to develop different moral priorities and orientations, but each worldview is a fundamentally moral one that provides models of what kind of person or behavior is “good” and “bad.”

Lakoff’s (2002) notion that people’s normative understanding of the proper relations between parents and children will shape their moral understanding of the world in general, and their vision of the proper relationship between government and citizens in particular, has recently received strong empirical support. Even when controlling for a host of alternative explanations, people with the strongest feelings about proper childrearing—regardless of whether their conception of proper childrearing emphasized nurturance or discipline—were also the most consistently liberal or conservative in their political opinions (Barker & Tinnick, 2006). Although Lakoff (2002) may be the most explicit about making an argument for the connections of different parenting models with people’s subsequent political orientation and sense of morality, the notion that parental style has an important impact on political reasoning and values is similarly emphasized in other theories of political socialization as well, each with consistent empirical support (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; McClosky & Chong, 1985; Milburn & Conrad, 1996; Tomkins, 1965). Each of these theories would therefore seem to lead to the prediction that moral convictions of those on the political left and right will not be differentially strong, but will simply be based on different moral criteria or priorities.

In summary, there are some suggestions that conservatives and liberals reason about morality in different ways, and that liberals may be less likely than conservatives to be moral absolutists. However, there are also good theoretical reasons to believe that liberals and conservatives are likely to have equally strong moral convictions, just ones that are based on different worldviews.

The current research consists of two studies that were conducted to test the moral mandate, conservative advantage, and equal opportunity motivator hypotheses. Study 1 explored whether people’s sense of moral conviction associated with their candidate preferences emerged as a unique predictor of reported voting behavior in the 2000 presidential election in a large nationally representative sample, and when controlling for candidate preference, strength of candidate preference, party identification, and strength of party identification. Study 2 tested the degree that moral convictions associated with a number of important campaign issues predicted intentions to vote in the 2004 presidential election, also controlling for variables that could provide an alternative explanation for these effects. Both studies also tested the conservative advantage and equal opportunity motivator hypotheses examining whether the effects of moral conviction on voting or intentions to vote were differentially strong for those on the political right and left. Before turning to the specifics of these studies, however, we briefly review how we measure moral conviction and evidence in support of the construct validity of this measure.

*Measuring Moral Conviction*

The 2004 exit poll represented an attempt to gain knowledge about the connection between morality and political engagement by asking people to identify what led them to vote the way they did. Other researchers have begun to try to gain further insight into the question of “moral values” and politics by using open-ended probes instead of close-ended questions, in short, by asking people what they mean when they cite moral values as an explanation for their voting behavior (see Langer & Cohen, 2005; Schuman, 2006). There are reasons to believe, however, that people may not be as adept at explaining *why* they perceive a particular attitude as reflecting their moral beliefs as they are at recognizing *whether* a given attitude is a moral one. Although people may sometimes think through issues carefully and judge right and wrong based on reasoning, recent research indicates that people often identify or judge whether something is moral or immoral, right or wrong, based on strong, intuitive, and visceral reactions to stimuli instead (Haidt, 2001; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Wheatley & Haidt, 2005). Specifically, most people persist in labeling some behaviors as morally wrong even when they cannot articulate reasons for why it is wrong (e.g., eating the family dog after it is killed by a car, see Haidt et al., 1993). Therefore, the explanations people provide for why they endorse an item such as “moral values” when asked why or for whom they voted are not likely to be particularly helpful in understanding distinctions between moral and nonmoral attitudes because people may not be able to access the reasons for their moral feelings even though they recognize their feelings, attitudes, or positions as being moral. Instead, people’s intuitive recognition that their attitude *is* moral appears to be more important than the post hoc reasons they provide for *why* they identify an attitude as a moral one. We therefore favor an approach that directly asks people whether their political attitudes or choices are moral without (a) asking them to explain why it is moral and using some normative theory to parse which explanations should count as “real” versus “mistaken” moral responses, (b) pitting morality against researcher-determined alternatives that are either more general or specific than the moral values category (e.g., the choice alternatives presented in the 2004 exit poll), or (c) forcing a choice between the blanket category of morality and alternatives that themselves could be seen in a moral light (e.g., the economy or the Iraq War).

In addition, it has been our goal to measure moral conviction without confounding this construct with other markers of attitude strength. Therefore, we have generally tested hypotheses about connections of attitudes to morality by using a single-item face valid measure of moral conviction. Specifically, we ask people their degree of agreement with an item such as “My feelings about X are a reflection of my core moral beliefs and convictions,” or we ask them “to what extent is your attitude about X a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions?” Skitka et al. (2005, Study 2), for example, measured various markers of



attitude strength in addition to a moral conviction item with respect to four contemporary social issues in a community sample of adults: abortion, capital punishment, the legalization of marijuana, and building new nuclear power plants. Results indicated that variability in moral conviction was (a) positively correlated with attitude extremity and certainty across all four issues [average  $r(80) = .39$  and  $r(80) = .28$ , respectively], (b) modestly correlated with attitude importance in two of four issues [average  $r(80) = .20$ ], (c) modestly correlated with strength of left-right political orientation [average  $r(80) = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ], and (d) uncorrelated with strength of directional political orientation [average  $r(80) = -.07$ ; in other words, political liberals and conservatives were equally likely to have moral convictions about these issues]. These results indicated that moral conviction was somewhat associated with traditional indicators of attitude strength (primarily attitude extremity), but did not reduce to these other constructs given that shared variance ranged only from 0% (directional political orientation) to 15% (extremity).

Moreover, stronger reported moral conviction associated with each of the issues studied by Skitka et al. (2005, Study 2) predicted greater preferred social distance from others who were attitudinally dissimilar on each of these respective issues when controlling for political orientation, strength of political orientation, attitude extremity, importance, certainty, and the strength of moral conviction people associated with their attitudes about each of the other topics (an attempt to control for possible individual differences in the tendency to see issues in a moral light). Other results indicated that having strong moral convictions about abortion was associated with sitting closer to someone who shared one's moral view and further from someone who did not share one's view on this issue (Skitka et al., 2005, Study 3). Again, these results held even when attitude extremity, importance, and centrality associated with people's abortion attitudes were statistically controlled (*note*: none of these other variables predicted the physical distance people maintained from the target person). Finally, people's ability to resolve conflict in groups differed as a function of whether the issue people discussed was a reflection of their moral convictions or their strong attitudes. Attitudinally heterogeneous groups composed of people with moral mandates had greater difficulty coming to consensus and had more tense and defensive interpersonal interactions (by both participant and third-party observer reports) than similarly heterogeneous groups with strong but non-moral attitudes (Skitka et al., 2005, Study 4).

In addition to the tests of discriminant validity described above, we recently tested the convergent validity of our usual measure by testing how well it predicted a similarly face valid measure of moral conviction, that is, the degree that participants indicated that their attitude on a given issue was "connected to their fundamental beliefs about right and wrong" (Bauman, Lytle, & Skitka, 2007). In support of the construct validity of the moral conviction measure, people's strength of moral conviction and beliefs about right and wrong in the issue-

domain of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) were highly correlated,  $r(650) = .82$ ,  $p < .001$ . Additionally, the right and wrong item correlated substantially more strongly with the moral conviction item than it did with any of the other measures assessed, including strength of political orientation,  $r(650) = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ , attitude extremity  $r(650) = .49$ ,  $p < .01$ , importance,  $r(650) = .61$ ,  $p < .01$ , centrality,  $r(650) = .67$ ,  $p < .01$ , frequency of church attendance,  $r(650) = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ , religiosity,  $r(650) = .29$ , or self-reported ties of people's attitudes about PAS to their religious beliefs,  $r(650) = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ . Moreover, the partial correlation between moral conviction and the right-wrong item remained robust, even when controlling for all of these other variables,  $r_p(650) = .62$ ,  $p < .01$ . These results also were replicated with a student sample and using a broader array of issues (e.g., the use of "stress" interrogation techniques when interviewing detainees during wartime, increasing efforts to curb illegal immigration, the continued use of capital punishment in the United States, and instituting a mandatory testing requirement to graduate high school; Bauman et al., 2007, Study 2).

In summary, self-reported moral conviction contributed unique variance in explaining relevant social judgment and behavior that was not reduced to or explained away by structural aspects of attitudes, political orientation, or stable individual differences in the tendency to moralize issues; these results all support the discriminant validity of the moral mandate measure and construct. Recent research also indicated that our measure of moral conviction had good convergent validity. It is important to note that our measure does not require that participants choose among other alternatives (e.g., an attitude need not be about the Iraq War *or* be a moral value), and that it does not reduce to other indices of attitude strength or to variables such as strength of political orientation. We turn now to Study 1, a study that was designed to test how well moral conviction predicted voting behavior in the 2000 Presidential election.

## Study 1

### *Method*

*Participants.* The study sample was drawn from a nationally representative panel of respondents maintained by Knowledge Networks (KN). KN recruits their panel members using random-digit-dialing telephone selection methods. Panel members agree to complete approximately one survey a week in exchange for a free device to connect to the Internet (e.g., WebTV) and Internet access. The characteristics of the panel closely resemble the U.S. Census (see <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/> for comparisons of the panel with the U.S. census, as well as for methodological details).

On Nov. 7, 2000, 3,500 adult KN panel members received an email with a hyperlink to the survey. The survey site was protected from nonpanel member

access. When the fielding period ended on Nov. 17, 2000,<sup>2</sup> 2,236 people had responded (a within-panel response rate of 64%). Panelists who responded to the survey were no different in demographic profile from those that did not.

Preliminary analysis indicated that 50% of the sample reported that they voted for or preferred the Democrat candidate Al Gore, 45% voted for or preferred the Republican candidate George W. Bush, 3.5% voted for or preferred the Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, and less than 1% voted for or preferred other candidates. Because few participants supported candidates other than Bush or Gore, analysis focused on participants who indicated that they preferred one of these majority party candidates ( $N = 1,853$ ).

### *Characteristics of the Sample*

The sample was 51% female, ranged in age from 18 to 100 ( $M = 46.39$ ,  $SD = 16.55$ ), was 84% White, 9% Black/African-American, and the remainder was otherwise racially identified. Nine percent of the sample had not graduated from high school, 33% were high school graduates or equivalents, 29% had some college but no degree, and the remainder had a college degree.

### *Measures*

*Voting behavior.* Participants first were asked whether they voted in the presidential election. If participants indicated that they voted, they were asked for whom they voted, with the response options of *Bush*, *Gore*, *Buchanan*, *Nader*, *other*, and *I don't know*. If participants indicated that they did not vote, they were asked which of the candidates they wanted to win the election (and were given the same response options as those who indicated that they voted).

*Candidate preference.* Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "I feel very strongly about who should win the presidential election." Participants responded on a 7-point bipolar scale with scale point labels of *strongly agree*, *moderately agree*, *slightly agree*, *uncertain*, *slightly disagree*, *moderately disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. Higher scores on this measure therefore reflected stronger candidate preferences.

*Moral conviction.* Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "My choice for president reflects something about

<sup>2</sup> The outcome of the 2000 presidential election hung in abeyance between November 7, 2000, and December 12, 2000, because the election was too close to call in Florida. The Florida State Constitution required a recount, but there was considerable ambiguity about how it should proceed, that is, whether ballots should be recounted by hand or by machine. Eventually, the Supreme Court intervened and stopped hand counts of ballots in Florida on December 12, 2000, a decision that led Florida's electoral college votes to go to Bush. Our survey was in the field during the first 17 days of the election impasse, several weeks before the Supreme Court ruling and the outcome of the election was known.

my core moral values and convictions.” Participants responded on a 7-point bipolar scale with scale point labels of *strongly agree*, *moderately agree*, *slightly agree*, *uncertain*, *slightly disagree*, *moderately disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. This item was reverse scored so that higher scores reflected stronger moral conviction.

*Party identification.* When participants first joined the KN panel, they completed a background profile. The profile included a set of questions that assessed whether and to what extent participants identified themselves as either Republicans or Democrats (see Knight, 1999, for more details). Responses to these questions were combined to create a 7-point scale that ranged from *very strong Republican* (+3) to *very strong Democrat* (−3). Strength of party identification was operationalized as the absolute value of this measure.

## Results

An underlying assumption of the moral mandate, conservative advantage, and equal opportunity motivator hypotheses is that some people perceive their candidate preferences to have moral relevance. To test this assumption, we inspected responses on the moral conviction measure. Consistent with expectations, 62% of the sample moderately or very much agreed that their candidate preference reflected something about their core moral values and convictions ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ). Because some but certainly not all participants felt that their candidate preferences were rooted in moral convictions, it was reasonable to proceed with hypothesis testing (see Table 1 for additional descriptive detail).

### *Predictors of Voting Behavior*

Binary logistic regression tested whether moral conviction about candidate preferences significantly increased the odds of voting in the 2000 election (to test the moral mandate hypothesis) and whether the strength of the effect of moral conviction about candidate preferences on voting behavior differed as a function of political orientation (to test the conservative advantage and equal opportunity hypotheses). The analysis regressed voting behavior on demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education, and income), party identification, strength of party identification, candidate preference, strength of candidate preference, moral conviction, and the interactions of moral conviction and the nondemographic variables. Results indicated that none of the interactions were significant. Therefore, the effect of moral conviction, party, and strength of party identification on voting behavior did not change as a function of whether people were Republicans or Democrats, how strong this identification was, or whether they preferred Bush or Gore to win the election. In short, results were inconsistent with the conservative advantage hypothesis and consistent with the equal opportunity motivator hypothesis.

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables in the 2000 Presidential Election Study (Study 1,  $N = 1,853$ )

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Gender	0.52	0.50	1.00									
(2) Age	47.62	16.53	.00	1.00								
(3) Education	4.13	1.60	-.05	-.08*	1.00							
(4) Income	10.72	3.49	-.07*	-.01	.31*	1.00						
(5) Party Identification	-0.18	3.49	-.09*	-.01	.07	.11*	1.00					
(6) Strength of Party Identification	1.54	1.17	-.06*	-.17*	.05	.06*	-.06*	1.00				
(7) Candidate Preference	0.47	0.50	-.09*	.01	.04	.09*	.62*	.01	1.00			
(8) Strength of Candidate Preference	1.87	1.54	.00	.10*	.08*	.08*	.09*	.20*	.11*	1.00		
(9) Moral Conviction	1.61	1.58	.03	.14*	.09*	.09*	.12*	.23*	.14*	.64*	1.00	
(10) Vote	0.81	0.39	.04	.28*	.15*	.15*	.04*	.20*	.04	.29*	.27*	1.00

*Note:* Party identification was measured on a -3 (very strong Democrat) to +3 (very strong Republican) scale; strength of party identification was the absolute value of this measure. Higher scores on candidate preference indicated a preference for Bush over Gore; strength of candidate preference was measured on a 0-3 scale and moral conviction was measured on -3 to +3 scales, and higher values indicated more extreme attitudes and moral convictions. Candidate preference was coded 0 = Bush, 1 = Gore. Higher values on the vote variable reflected voting in the 2000 presidential election. \* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2.** Unique Predictors of Voting in the 2000 Election  
(Study 1,  $N = 1,853$ )

Variables	B	Odds ratio
Gender	-.24	0.79
Age	.05**	1.05
Education	.24**	1.27
Income	.07**	1.07
Candidate preference	-.10	0.90
Strength of candidate preference	.27**	1.31
Party identification	.07	1.07
Strength of party identification.	.23**	1.26
Strength of moral conviction	.16**	1.18

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . No interactions were significant.

Because the interactions were not significant, we conducted a second analysis excluding them from the model (Aiken & West, 1991). As can be seen in Table 2, results indicated that strength of candidate preference and strength of party identification uniquely increased the odds that people voted in the 2000 presidential election. As strength of candidate preference and strength of party identification increased, so did the likelihood that people voted. Party identification and candidate preference—in the absence of the strength of these variables—did not affect the odds of voting in the 2000 election. In other words, how strongly people felt about their preferred candidate and how strongly they identified as a Republican or Democrat increased the odds that people voted in the 2000 presidential election, but there was no effect of candidate preference or party on people's tendency to vote in this election (a finding consistent with the fact that this election was also a very close one).

In support of the moral mandate hypothesis, moral conviction about candidate preferences also uniquely increased the odds of voting, even when controlling for effects of candidate preference, party identification, strength of candidate preference, strength of party identification, and demographic variables. As strength of moral conviction about one's candidate preference increased, so did the likelihood that one voted.

#### *Further Tests of the Equal Opportunity Motivator and the Conservative Advantage Hypotheses*

One could potentially argue that because those on the political left and right appear to base their moral convictions on different foundations, what they label as moral convictions might be different and differently strong, even if they are not differentially motivating. Therefore, a soft form of the conservative advantage hypothesis might be that moral absolutism (a more conservative tendency) may be a stronger foundation of moral conviction about candidate preferences than moral

**Table 3.** Mean and Standard Deviations of Moral Conviction as a Function of Candidate Preference and Voting in the 2000 Election (Study 1,  $N = 1,853$ )

Vote	Bush Supporters		Gore Supporters	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Yes	2.05 <sub>a</sub>	1.43	1.60 <sub>a</sub>	1.52
No	0.67 <sub>b</sub>	1.65	0.81 <sub>b</sub>	1.63

Means with noncommon subscripts are significantly different at  $p < .01$ .

relativism (a more liberal tendency). If this hypothesis were true, then one would expect to see differences as a function of candidate preference in the degree to which people perceived that their attitudes were rooted in moral conviction, even if we did not observe differences in whether moral conviction predicted voting behavior on the political left or right.

To test this “soft form” of the conservative advantage hypothesis, we examined whether there were larger differences in moral conviction between voters and nonvoters on the political right than on the political left. A 2 (Preferred candidate: Bush or Gore) X 2 (Vote: yes, no) between subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) with moral conviction as the dependent variable indicated that there was a main effect for candidate preference on moral conviction (see Table 3 for more detail). Bush supporters reported that their candidate preference was more strongly tied to moral conviction than Gore supporters,  $F(1, 1849) = 10.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . A much stronger main effect emerged, however, for the connections between voting and moral conviction. Participants who reported voting in the 2000 presidential election were higher in moral conviction than those who reported not voting in the election,  $F(1, 1849) = 144.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .07$ . Consistent with the equal opportunity motivator hypothesis, there was not a significant candidate preference by voting interaction on strength of moral conviction,  $F(1, 1849) = 2.98$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $\eta^2 = .002$ . The magnitude of the difference in moral conviction between Bush supporters who did and did not vote was the same magnitude as the difference in moral conviction between Gore supporters who did or did not vote. Therefore, although differential foundations of what Bush and Gore supporters label as moral may lead to a modest increase in Bush supporters’ sense that their candidate preferences were rooted in moral conviction, moral convictions were similarly motivating of turn-out at the polls for those on both the political right and left.

## Discussion

The results of Study 1 supported the moral mandate hypothesis and were more consistent with the equal opportunity motivator than the conservative electoral

advantage hypothesis. The degree that people felt that their candidate preferences were moral convictions was a significant predictor of whether they reported voting in the 2000 presidential election, an effect that emerged even when controlling for candidate preference, party identification, and the relative strength of these variables.

Although the 2000 election results were promising, moral conviction in this study was measured with respect to people's attitudes about the candidates themselves, rather than about salient political issues. Furthermore, people were retrospectively asked about whether they voted. People may therefore have inferred stronger or weaker moral conviction by referencing their voting behavior instead of their feelings (e.g., Bem, 1967). Therefore, in Study 2, we examined voting intentions in a student sample ( $N = 601$ ) in the context of the 2004 presidential election to (a) conceptually replicate the 2000 election results, (b) test whether there is an issue-based, in addition to a candidate-based, moral mandate effect, and (c) rule out a self-perception interpretation of the 2000 election study results.

## Study 2

Study 2 explored whether strength of moral conviction associated with hot button political issues (i.e., abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War) would predict intentions to vote in the 2004 presidential election and whether moral conviction would explain unique variance in intentions to vote even when controlling for attitude extremity on these same issues. Study 2 also provided an opportunity to test the conservative advantage and equal opportunity motivator hypotheses by testing whether Bush and Kerry supporters (as proxy indicators of right and left political leanings, respectively) were differentially likely to report that they intended to vote in the election, and if so, whether differences in moral conviction associated with the issues mentioned above might be able to account for this effect.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 601 introductory psychology students at the University of Illinois at Chicago who received partial credit toward fulfillment of a class requirement for their participation. Of these, 103 were Bush supporters, 411 were Kerry supporters, and 73 were supporters of other candidates or had no candidate preference. Because sample sizes in the latter two groups were so small, we retained only the Bush and Kerry supporters for analysis,  $N = 514$ .



*Procedure*

Participants completed a questionnaire that assessed their political attitudes and their voting intentions in the 2004 election as part of a larger survey in September of 2004. Specifically, participants were asked to report their attitudes and moral convictions about abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War, three social issues that political observers were predicting would be likely determinants of candidate preferences in the 2004 election. Participants were also asked the likelihood that they would vote and to identify their preferred candidate.

*Measures<sup>3</sup>*

*Voting intention.* To assess intentions to vote, participants were asked, “How likely is it that you will vote in the 2004 presidential election?” Participants responded on a 7-point bipolar scale that was scored from +3 to -3 with verbal endpoint anchors of *very likely* and *very unlikely*. Positive scores therefore indicated stronger intentions to vote.

*Candidate support.* To assess candidate support, participants were asked, “Who do you tend to support more for the 2004 presidential election?” Participants chose from four options: *George W. Bush*, *John Kerry*, *Other*, or *None*. Candidate support was used as a proxy indicator of political orientation: Bush supporters were assumed to be conservative, and Kerry supporters were assumed to be liberal, respectively. As mentioned earlier, participants who selected *other* or *none* were not included in analyses.

*Attitude extremity.* In addition to studying the predictive effects of moral conviction, Skitka et al. (2005) compared the relative explanatory power of a variety of indices of attitude strength (e.g., extremity, importance, certainty, and centrality) in predicting reactions to attitudinally similar and dissimilar others. Of these strength-related indices, only attitude extremity—that is, the relative strength of people’s positive or negative evaluations of a given attitude object—consistently explained unique variance in people’s reactions to attitudinally similar or dissimilar others. Given this backdrop, it therefore seemed most important to test for the effects of moral conviction when controlling for attitude extremity on each issue studied here. Attitudes were assessed by asking participants the extent that they supported or opposed each of three issues (legal abortion, legal gay marriage, the decision to go to war in Iraq). Participants responded on bipolar 7-point scales with the endpoint anchors of *strongly support* and *strongly oppose* each of these issues. These scales were initially coded from -3 to +3, with

<sup>3</sup> Questions were asked in the order they are presented in the method section. Questions about moral conviction were asked last to avoid what some see as the potential for moral conviction to serve as a demand characteristic, that is, that once someone labels an attitude as high in moral conviction they will feel pressured by social desirability concerns to report they intend to act on it.

positive numbers indicating stronger support. Attitude extremity with respect to each of these issues was operationalized as the absolute value of these measures.

*Moral conviction.* To assess moral conviction, we asked participants the extent that they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "My attitude about abortion [gay marriage, the decision to go to war in Iraq] is closely related to my core moral values and convictions." Participants responded on 7-point bipolar scales that were scored from -3 to +3 with endpoint labels of *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree*. Items were reverse scored so that higher numbers indicated stronger moral conviction.

## Results

Correlates of intentions to vote in the 2004 presidential election and other study variables are summarized in Table 4. At the bivariate level of analysis, attitude extremity on the issue of the Iraq War, and moral convictions associated with gay marriage and the Iraq War, were each associated with stronger intentions to vote. As attitude strength and moral conviction associated with these issues increased, so too did intention to vote. The only variable that correlated with our proxy indicator of left-right political orientation (candidate preference) was the degree of moral conviction people attached to the issue of gay marriage. People on the political right had stronger moral convictions on the issue of gay marriage than those on the political left. Although correlations between attitude extremity on the issues of abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War were not surprisingly correlated with people's strength of moral conviction on these same issues (*r*s ranged from .17 to .35), the strength of these correlations was not sufficiently strong that one would conclude that attitude extremity and moral conviction were necessarily the same construct. That said, the correlations were not sufficiently weak that one could entirely rule out this possibility either.

**Table 4.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Variables in the 2004 Voting Intention Study (Study 2, *N* = 514)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Voting Intention	0.96	2.39	1.00							
(2) Candidate Preference	-0.60	0.80	.02	1.00						
Attitude Extremity										
(3) Abortion	1.84	1.11	.01	.05	1.00					
(4) Gay Marriage	1.81	1.15	-.02	.00	.16**	1.00				
(5) Iraq War	1.89	1.05	.13**	-.04	.07	.01	1.00			
Moral Conviction										
(6) Abortion	4.48	1.47	.06	.06	.17**	.06	.02	1.00		
(7) Gay Marriage	4.09	1.70	.09*	.10*	.10*	.32**	.00	.44**	1.00	
(8) Iraq War	4.58	1.43	.17**	-.05	.03	.03	.35**	.33**	.36**	1.00

Note: Candidate preference was effects coded as -1 = Gore, +1 = Bush. \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01

**Table 5.** Standardized and Unstandardized Regression Weights of Predictors of Intentions to Vote in the 2004 Presidential Election (Study 2,  $N = 514$ )

Issue	$\beta$	B	SE	$t$
Abortion				
Candidate Preference	.02	.02	.13	0.19
Attitude Extremity	.02	.04	.09	0.48
Moral Conviction	.24	.16	.07	2.27*
Gay Marriage				
Candidate Preference	.00	.00	.13	0.03
Attitude Extremity	-.18	-.16	.09	-1.73
Moral Conviction	.23	.21	.06	3.35*
Iraq War				
Candidate Preference	.08	.08	.12	0.61
Attitude Extremity	.23	.20	.10	1.92
Moral Conviction	.32	.23	.07	3.01**

*Note:* Analyses were conducted separately as a function of issue. Attitude extremity and moral conviction did not interact with whether participants supported or opposed abortion, or with candidate preference to affect intentions to vote.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

In a similar vein, strength of moral conviction associated with the issues of abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War were also correlated ( $r_s = .33$  to  $.44$ ), but again, not at levels that would suggest that a tendency to see things in a moral light across these issues necessarily represented a common underlying construct. Because partitioning shared variance of moral conviction on one issue could potentially mask the effects of moral conviction on any given other issue, we first tested whether issue specific moral conviction explained unique variance in intentions to vote separately for each issue when controlling for candidate preference and attitude extremity using a series of standardized regressions.

In each case, variables were centered and the procedures described by Aiken and West (1991) for testing moderated regression were followed. The separate effects of attitude extremity, moral conviction, and the attitude extremity by moral conviction interaction term were entered in a standardized regression to predict intention to vote in each of the three issue domains (abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War). None of the interaction terms were significant, so the regression analyses were repeated excluding these terms from the model (see Aiken & West, 1991).

As can be seen in Table 5, and consistent with the moral mandate hypothesis, moral conviction explained unique variance in people's intention to vote beyond what could be explained by attitude extremity and candidate preference in all three issue domains; as moral conviction increased, so too did intentions to vote. Interestingly, attitude extremity explained unique variance in intentions to vote in only one attitude domain. As attitude extremity about the Iraq War increased, so too did participants' intention to vote. Attitude extremity associated with the issues of

abortion and gay marriage explained no unique variance in intention to vote, and to the extent there was a trend in the gay marriage context, stronger extremity was associated with reduced intentions to vote.

Other results indicated that Bush and Kerry supporters were equally likely to report that they intended to vote in the 2004 election. Moreover, candidate preference did not significantly moderate the effects of either attitude extremity or moral conviction on voting intentions in the attitude domains studied here. In other words, the effects for attitude extremity and moral conviction were the same for both Bush and Kerry supporters, a result that was more consistent with the equal opportunity than the conservative advantage hypothesis.

Additional analysis tested the effects of candidate preference, attitude strength, moral conviction, candidate preference by attitude strength, and candidate preference by moral conviction interactions including all issues in a single standard regression. Results of this analysis indicated that moral conviction associated with the issues of gay marriage and the Iraq War still explained significant unique variance in reported intention to vote even when controlling for attitude extremity and moral conviction on each of the other issues. However, moral conviction associated with abortion did not. This result was due to a modest tendency of those who had strong moral convictions about abortion to have stronger moral convictions about both gay marriage and the Iraq War. These results suggest that moral convictions associated with the issues of gay marriage and the Iraq War had stronger unique effects on intentions to vote than did moral conviction on abortion in the 2004 presidential election, at least for this student sample. Attitude extremity on the Iraq War, but not abortion or gay marriage, explained unique variance in intentions to vote in this model, but there were no effects for candidate preference. In summary, results of this analysis also supported the moral mandate hypothesis, and were more consistent with the equal opportunity motivator than the conservative advantage hypothesis.

#### *Further Tests of the Equal Opportunity Motivator and Conservative Advantage Hypotheses*

Similar to Study 1, we also tested a soft form of the conservative advantage hypothesis, that is, we explored whether there were differences as a function of candidate preference in people's strength of moral conviction on the issues of abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War by testing a 2 (Candidate preference: Bush, Kerry) X 3 (Attitude Domain: abortion, gay marriage, Iraq War) mixed design ANOVA with the dependent measure of moral conviction. Results indicated a significant interaction of candidate preference and attitude domain,  $F(2, 1012) = 5.40, p < .01$ . As can be seen in Table 6, Tukey tests indicated that Bush and Kerry supporters had equally strong moral convictions about abortion and the Iraq War. Bush supporters' strength of moral conviction about the issue of gay marriage, however, was significantly stronger than Kerry supporters' moral con-

**Table 6.** Bush and Kerry Supporters' Attitude Strength and Moral Conviction Attached to the Issues of Abortion, Gay Marriage, and the Iraq War (Study 2,  $N = 514$ )

	Bush Supporters		Kerry Supporters	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attitude (Oppose = -3, Support = +3)				
Abortion	-0.17 <sub>a</sub>	2.24	0.34 <sub>b</sub>	2.11
Gay Marriage	-0.41 <sub>a</sub>	2.13	0.38 <sub>b</sub>	2.11
Iraq War	1.21 <sub>a</sub>	1.75	-1.59 <sub>b</sub>	1.50
Attitude Extremity				
Abortion	1.96 <sub>a</sub>	1.07	1.82 <sub>a</sub>	1.12
Gay Marriage	1.82 <sub>a</sub>	1.16	1.81 <sub>a</sub>	1.14
Iraq War	1.83 <sub>a</sub>	1.07	1.93 <sub>a</sub>	1.03
Moral Conviction				
Abortion	1.71 <sub>a</sub>	1.44	1.48 <sub>a</sub>	1.47
Gay Marriage	1.41 <sub>a</sub>	1.46	0.99 <sub>b</sub>	1.77
Iraq War	1.47 <sub>a</sub>	1.43	1.65 <sub>a</sub>	1.42

*Note:* Attitude extremity ranged from 0–3; attitude and moral conviction ranged from -3 to +3. Means with noncommon subscripts across Bush and Kerry supporters were significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

viction on this issue. In summary, when tested in soft form, two out of three tests were still more consistent with the equal opportunity than the conservative advantage hypothesis. With respect to one issue (gay marriage), conservatives had stronger moral convictions than did liberals, but the size and strength of this difference was not sufficient to translate into a conservative electoral advantage.

## Discussion

The results of Study 2 conceptually replicated the results of Study 1. In three out of three tests, moral conviction associated with issues of the day—i.e., abortion, gay marriage, and the Iraq War—explained significant unique variance in intentions to vote even when controlling for attitude extremity and candidate preference. Given that we found similar levels of support for the moral mandate hypothesis when testing retrospective reports of voting behavior and prospective voting intentions, it is clear that participants in Study 1 did not simply decide that their voting behavior was morally motivated post hoc (e.g., “because I voted, I must have had strong moral convictions about doing so”). Instead, moral convictions about both candidates and issues predicted higher levels of political engagement in the form of both behavior and intentions.

In addition, like Study 1, the results of Study 2 were more consistent with the equal opportunity motivator than the conservative electoral advantage hypothesis.

Candidate preference did not moderate the effects of either attitude extremity or moral conviction on participants' intentions to vote in the 2004 presidential election. In other words, stronger moral convictions were equally strong predictors of intention to vote in the 2004 presidential election for those on both the political right and left.

### General Discussion

Despite the methodological problems associated with the exit interviews following the 2004 presidential election, our results suggest that the conclusions of this poll were partially right. Moral convictions associated with issues of the day and candidate preferences emerged as unique predictors of voting behavior in the 2000 presidential election and intentions to vote in the 2004 presidential election. Other results, however, indicated that the exit polls also got some of it wrong. Although we found some evidence that conservatives' candidate preferences in the 2000 election were stronger in moral conviction than liberals' (a difference that accounted for about 1% of the variance in moral conviction in the 2000 election) and that Bush supporters had stronger moral convictions than Kerry supporters on one out of three issues studied in the 2004 election, there was no evidence that these differences led to a conservative electoral advantage in either study. Instead, the effects of moral conviction on political engagement were equally strong for those on the political right and left.

Evidence in support of the moral mandate and the equal opportunity motivator hypotheses was found across different dependent measures (self-reported voting behavior and voting intentions), samples (a nationally representative and a student sample), elections (the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections), and when controlling for a number of alternative explanations (including partisanship, strength of partisanship, candidate preference, and strength of candidate preference, and a host of demographic variables in Study 1, and attitude extremity and candidate preference in Study 2). Results converged on the common conclusion that knowing whether an attitude position or candidate preference is felt as a strong moral conviction increases intentions to vote and voter turnout on both sides of the political spectrum—in other words, moral conviction did not lead to a conservative electoral advantage.

There are a number of reasons why our results look so different from the 2004 exit poll finding that moral values led to a conservative electoral advantage. For example, the 2004 exit poll item asked, "which ONE issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for president?" as one of several options. The moral values response option was incommensurate with the other items listed, nor was it a discrete political issue (people do not spontaneously volunteer moral values as an issue in open-ended questions, such as "what is the most important problem facing the nation today," even when they rate the issues they nominate as related to their core moral beliefs and convictions; see Skitka et al., 2005, Study 1). Our method

for assessing the role of morality in the studies reported on here did not require that people choose morality over and above other considerations, such as taxes, education, or Iraq, and because it was “stand alone” rather than one of several options, it was not vulnerable to context or comparison effects. Finally, the 2004 exit poll study only sampled voters and limited predictions to candidate choice, whereas we sampled both voters and nonvoters, and explored voting and intentions to vote in addition to candidate preferences. By addressing a number of measurement and methodological limitations of the 2004 exit poll, we feel we were able to put the conservative electoral advantage to a stronger test.

Although we attempted to address many of the methodological limitations of the 2004 exit poll question, one could still be concerned about whether people can accurately report their attitudes, much less whether their attitudes reflect moral convictions. People may not know, for example, why they like Candidate A more than Candidate B, but they may nonetheless attempt to answer the question when directly asked. Consistent with this concern, researchers are increasingly aware that a great deal of what they are interested in measuring is not consciously accessible to participants (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Wilson 2003). Given the accumulation of evidence that self-reported moral conviction explains a wide range of behaviors (e.g., preferred social and physical distance from attitudinally dissimilar others, behavior in attitudinally homogeneous and heterogeneous groups, and voting and voting intentions), however, we are increasingly confident of the conclusion that people can successfully identify when their feelings and sentiments reflect moral convictions, even if they cannot always explain *why* their feelings are moral ones (Haidt et al., 1993).

In addition to demonstrating the predictive value of our measure of moral conviction in the context of voting and intentions to vote, the two studies reported on here supported our working theory of moral mandates. One of the longest standing challenges for attitude theory and research has been the generally weak association between attitudes and attitude-relevant behavior. Wicker’s (1969) classic review of the attitude literature, for example, indicated that typical correlations between attitudes and overt attitude-relevant behavior “are rarely above .30, and often are near zero” (p. 75). Although assessing indices of attitude strength improves attitude-behavior correspondence (e.g., Krosnick & Petty, 1995), our results suggest that it may be important to consider attitude content as well. When attitudes reflect preferences—even very strong preferences—they might easily be overwhelmed by other factors that prevent people from translating those preferences into action. In contrast, the anticipated public and private consequences (e.g., guilt, regret, shame) of failing to do something one “ought” to do may be much more negative and severe than failing to do something one would “prefer”.

In addition to supporting our working theory of moral mandates, our results also were more consistent with theories that emphasize that political engagement of those on the political left and right are equally likely to be morally motivated (e.g., Lakoff, 2002), than they were with theories that suggest that moral consid-

erations are more likely to motivate those on the political right than left. Even if their moral compasses are set in different directions, our results indicated that liberals and conservatives were equally likely to view their candidate choices and positions on issues of the day as moral convictions, and moral convictions had similar connections to political engagement.

Some political advisors seem to have intuitively grasped the notion that morality is an important motivator of behavior, and implicitly or sometimes explicitly advise their candidates to moralize issues (e.g., Lakoff, 2004; Luntz, 2007). An interesting question for future research will be to explore what it means, exactly, to moralize an issue, and to explore empirically whether there is any support for the notion that making morally charged persuasive appeals is any more effective than other kinds of messages in mobilizing voters. Some evidence suggests that what may be important in moral persuasion will be the activation of specific forms of affect, such as disgust. For example, Wheatley and Haidt (2005) found that hypnotically inducing people to feel disgust in response to neutral words led them to judge descriptions of acts that subsequently used those words as more morally wrong than participants who had not been hypnotized to associate disgust with these words. One way to moralize issues may therefore be to associate certain positions on issues or even specific candidates with disgust.

In summary, people whose feelings about candidates or issues were experienced as strong moral convictions were higher in political engagement than those whose feelings were not. Moreover, moral conviction operated as an equal opportunity motivator of political engagement for those on the political right and left. Further research is needed to learn whether or how easily moral convictions can be manipulated or exploited in an effort to mobilize voters and whether what moralizes issues or candidates and therefore mobilizes voters is the same for those on the political left and right.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research and preparation of this article were facilitated by grant support from the National Science Foundation to the first author (NSF/SES-0111612, NSF/SES-0210053, NSF/SES-0518084, NSF/SES-0530380). Thanks to Knowledge Networks for sampling, fielding, and survey services associated with Study 1, with particular thanks to J. Michael Dennis for his support on this project. The authors also thank Brad Lytle, Sylvia Perry, and Ben Saunders for their assistance with data collection in Study 2, and Jonathon Haidt, Allyson Holbrook, Brad Lytle, Elizabeth Mullen, Edward Sargis, and our anonymous reviewers for comments on previous drafts of this manuscript. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Linda J. Skitka, University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Psychology, m/c 285, 1007 W. Harrison St., Chicago, IL, 60607-7137, lskitka@uic.edu.



## REFERENCES

- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Altemeyer, R. (1996). *The authoritarian specter*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Barker, D. C., & Tinnick, J. D. (2006). Competing visions of parental roles and ideological constraint. *American Political Science Review*, *100*, 249–263.
- Bauman, C. W., Lytle, B., & Skitka, L. J. (2007). Measuring moral conviction. *Unpublished manuscript*. Northwestern University.
- Bem, D. J. (1967). Self-perception: An alternative interpretation of cognitive dissonance phenomena. *Psychological Review*, *74*, 183–200.
- Boyd, R. (1988). How to be a moral realist. In G. Sayre-McCord (Ed.), *Essays in moral realism* (pp. 181–228). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Emler, N. (2002). Morality and political orientations: An analysis of their relationship. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *13*, 259–291.
- Emler, N., Renwick, S., & Malone, B. (1983). The relationship between moral reasoning and political orientation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*, 1073–1080.
- Frank, T. (2004). *What's the matter with Kansas? How conservatives won the heart of America*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review*, *108*, 814–834.
- Haidt, J., Koller, S., & Dias, M. (1993). Affect, culture, and morality, or is it wrong to eat your dog? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *65*, 613–628.
- Hare, R. M. (1981). *Moral thinking*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Hillygus, S., & Shields, T. (2005). Moral issues and voter decision making in the 2004 presidential election. *Political Science and Politics*, *38*, 201–209.
- Hume, D. (1888). *A treatise on human nature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.
- Hunter, J. D. (1991). *Culture wars: The struggle to define America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Kant, I. (1786/1947). *Fundamentals of the metaphysics of morals*. New York: Longmans.
- Knight, K. (1999). Liberalism and conservatism. In J. P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.), *Measures of social psychological attitudes: Measures of political attitudes*, Vol. 2 (pp. 59–158). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive developmental approach to socialization. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization theory* (pp. 347–480). Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Krosnick, J. A., & Petty, R. E. (1995). Attitude strength: An overview. In R. E. Petty & J. A. Krosnick (Eds.), *Attitude strength: Antecedents and consequences* (pp. 1–24). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lakoff, G. (2002). *Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co.
- Langer, G. E. (2004). A question of values. *New York Times*, op-ed, November 6, p. 19.
- Langer, G. E., & Cohen, J. (2005). Voters and values in the 2004 election, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *69*, 744–759.
- Layman, G. (2001). *The great divide: Religious and cultural conflict in American party politics*. New York: Columbia.
- Luntz, F. (2007). *Words that work: It's not what you say, it's what people hear*. New York: Hyperion.

- Mackie, J. L. (1977). *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong*. New York: Penguin.
- McClosky, H., & Chong, D. (1985). Similarities and differences between left-wing and right-wing radicals. *British Journal of Political Science*, *15*, 329–363.
- Media Matters (2004). Media overplayed “moral values” as “decisive” election issue. Retrieved from <http://mediamatters.org/items/printable/200411100010> on April 1, 2005.
- Milburn, M. A., & Conrad, S. D. (1996). *The politics of denial*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, *84*, 231–259.
- Nucci, L. P. (2001). *Education in the moral domain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schuman, H. (2006). The validity of the 2004 “moral values” question. *The Forum*, *4*, Issue 2, Article 5. Available at: <http://www.bepress.com/forum/vol4/iss2/art5>.
- Shweder, R. A. (2002). The nature of morality: The category of bad acts. *Medical Ethics*, *9*, 6–7.
- Skitka, L. J., Bauman, C. W., & Sargis, E. G. (2005). Moral conviction: Another contributor to attitude strength or something more? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*, 895–917.
- Skitka, L. J., & Mullen, E. (2002). Understanding judgments of fairness in a real-world political context: A test of the value protection model of justice reasoning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *28*, 1419–1429.
- Smith, M. (1994). *The moral problem*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Thoma, S. J., Narvaez, D., Rest, J., & Derryberry, P. (1999). Does moral judgment development reduce to political attitudes or verbal ability? Evidence using the defining issues test. *Educational Psychology Review*, *11*, 325–341.
- Tomkins, S. S. (1965). Affect and the psychology of knowledge. In S. S. Tomkins & C. E. Izard (Eds.), *Affect, cognition, and personality* (pp. 72–97). New York: Springer.
- Turiel, E. (1983). *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Kenhove, P., Vermeir, I., & Verniers, S. (2001). An empirical investigation of the relationships between ethical beliefs, ethical ideology, political preference, and need for closure. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *32*, 347–361.
- Wicker, A. W. (1969). Attitudes versus actions: The relationship of verbal and overt behavioral responses to attitude objects. *Journal of Social Issues*, *25*, 41–78.
- Wheatley, T., & Haidt, J. (2005). Hypnotic disgust makes moral judgments more severe. *Psychological Science*, *16*, 780–784.
- Wilson, T. D. (2003). Knowing when to ask: Introspection and the adaptive unconscious. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *10*, 131–140.