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# Moral Foundations, System Justification, and Support for Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election

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**Abstract:** We examine the role of moral foundations and system justification in explaining support for Donald Trump in the 2016 general election using data from the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. A number of important findings emerge. First, we find that there are important partisan and ideological differences when it comes to moral foundations and system justification. Second, we find that moral foundations predict support for Trump above and beyond traditional determinants of vote choice such as ideology, partisanship, religiosity, and demographic characteristics. Third, we find that a measure of political system justification is not related to vote choice in our sample. This casts doubt on the idea that support for Trump was mostly about protesting the political system. This paper adds to the growing body of research showing that psychological concepts and theories are important in understanding voter decision-making in the 2016 presidential election and in elections more generally.

## Introduction

Donald Trump's victory in 2016 came as quite a surprise. Indeed, many pollsters, pundits, and apparently even Donald Trump himself expected that Hillary Clinton would prevail in the race for the presidency.<sup>1</sup> Given the outcome of the 2016 presidential election, there has been a great deal of curiosity about the factors that led people to vote for Trump, a fairly unconventional political candidate.<sup>2</sup> To date, variables like education, class, race, economic discontent, racism, sexism, and attitudes toward immigration have received a fair amount of attention from the

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1 <https://www.newsweek.com/mike-pence-donald-jr-and-melania-never-thought-trump-would-become-president-769701>.

2 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/us/politics/donald-trump-gop.html>.

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media and political scientists (see, e.g. Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2017; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018; Setzler and Yanus 2018).<sup>3</sup> In this paper, we are interested in examining whether two important ideas from psychology – Moral Foundations Theory and System Justification Theory – help explain vote choice in the 2016 presidential general election.

A brief overview of each of these ideas helps to illuminate how they might be relevant to the 2016 presidential election. Moral Foundations Theory is based on the idea that “human groups construct moral virtues, meanings, and institutions in variable ways by relying, to varying degrees, on five innate psychological systems. Each system produces fast, automatic gut-reactions of like and dislike when certain patterns are perceived in the social world, which in turn guide judgments of right and wrong” (Kolevaa et al. 2012, p. 185).<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, moral thinking can be organized into at least five dimensions: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Kolevaa et al. 2012). As a quick overview, harm/care focuses on the extent to which people care for the weak and attempt to prevent harm. The fairness/reciprocity moral foundation focuses on equality and justice and leads people to disapprove of violations of these ideals. The ingroup/loyalty dimension focuses on attachments to groups (e.g. country) and leads people to approve of those who contribute to the group’s well-being and cohesion. Authority/respect captures respect for authority, tradition, and societal order. Lastly, the purity/sanctity foundation is based on the emotion of disgust in response to biological and social contaminants. Research has illustrated that liberals and conservatives base their judgments on different configurations of moral foundations (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009), that moral foundations predict issue positions (Kolevaa et al. 2012), and that, at least in the 2012 presidential election, moral foundations were related to vote intentions (Franks and Scherr 2015).<sup>5</sup> According to an analysis of data from an undergraduate sample by Franks and Scherr (2015), individualizing foundations (the sum of harm and fairness) predicted increased intentions to vote for Democrat Barack Obama and binding foundations (the sum of loyalty, authority, and purity) predicted increased intentions to vote for Republican Mitt Romney. Thus,

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<sup>3</sup> For example: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/upshot/why-trump-won-working-class-whites.html>, <https://www.thenation.com/article/economic-anxiety-didnt-make-people-vote-trump-racism-did/>, <http://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/355931-sexism-in-2016>, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/education-not-income-predicted-who-would-vote-for-trump/>.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. Haidt (2007) for additional information.

<sup>5</sup> Iyer et al. (2010) examines moral foundations within the 2008 Democratic primary and find that “Higher scores on group-based morality, primary psychopathy, and moral relativism predicted relative favorability toward Clinton. Higher scores on individual-based morality, empathy, and global concern for others predicted relative favorability toward Obama” (293).

there is some preliminary evidence that moral foundations are related to candidate support in presidential contests. Does the same hold true in 2016?

In a module of the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES), we included measures that capture two of the moral foundations, purity and authority. As Kolev et al. (2012) note, purity and authority tend to go together and are highly correlated. We expect that these moral foundations will be associated with vote choice in 2016. More specifically, those who are concerned about purity should be more likely to support Trump over Clinton. Our argument about why these moral foundations should be positively related to support for Trump is based on the idea that during campaigns, the rhetoric that candidates use can activate certain attitudes and predispositions among voters, increasing their relevance to voter-decision making (Kaplan, Park, and Gelman 2012; Hart 2013). Research by Hooghe and Dassonneville (2018) has indicated that anti-immigrant sentiments and racial resentment had important effects on vote choice in 2016, likely triggered by the way Trump talked about minority groups and immigrants during the campaign. Trump's rhetoric on disgust and purity during the campaign likely made it easier for voters to connect their moral foundations to the candidates. During the 2016 election, Trump regularly invoked the emotion of disgust. For example, in response to Clinton taking a bathroom break during one of the presidential debates and being late in getting back to the stage, Trump made the following statement: "I know where she went, it's disgusting, I don't want to talk about it. No, it's too disgusting. Don't say it, it's disgusting, let's not talk."<sup>6</sup> Trump also invoked images related to purity when addressing political issues like immigration. For example, Trump continually expressed support for building a wall on the Mexican border, which could be viewed as a way to prevent contamination by "outsiders." Those who place a lot of weight on authority should also be more inclined to support Trump than Clinton. During the election, Trump displayed authoritarian tendencies. Again, this can be seen by examining the way that Trump talked about different issues and topics during the campaign. For instance, he regularly talked about "overruling generals, disregarding international law, ordering soldiers to commit war crimes, jailing his opponent."<sup>7</sup> At one point during the election, he even stated that "Nobody knows the system better than me, which is why I alone can fix it."<sup>8</sup> One study by MacWilliams (2016) found that an authoritarian personality measure (using four questions about child-rearing) was related to support for Trump over other candidates within the Republican primary. If authoritarian tendencies are used to distinguish among

<sup>6</sup> <http://time.com/4158303/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-disgusting-schlanged/>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-ed-trumps-authoritarian-vision/>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/projects/la-ed-trumps-authoritarian-vision/>.

candidates within primaries (where partisanship is held constant), they should also be related to candidate support in general elections.

We are also interested in System Justification Theory, which is based on the notion that “there is a general (but not insurmountable) system justification motive to defend and justify the status quo” (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004, p. 887). Interestingly, psychologists have developed measures of general, gender, economic, and political system justification. In a recent paper, Azevedo, Jost, and Rothmund (2017) examined the link between three measures of system justification and vote choice in 2016. More specifically, they found that economic and gender-specific system justification measures were positively related to support for Trump and that a general system justification measure was negatively associated with support for Trump. In this paper, we are interested in political system justification given the idea that part of what motivated people to vote for Trump was dissatisfaction with the political system. Ideas about maintaining the status quo versus the need to change the American political system were frequently discussed during the 2016 election. Indeed, on the campaign trail Trump promised radical changes to the political system. For example, he famously remarked that he intended to “drain the swamp” (of bureaucracy in Washington, DC) if elected, often referred to the need to fix the “rigged system,” and noted that his policies would be opposed by the entrenched special interests in Washington. Our expectation is that Trump’s ideas about the political system likely appealed to those without strong commitments to the current political system (e.g. those who think the government lacks legitimacy due to special interest influence, those who think that radical changes to the system are necessary, etc.).

Overall, then, we are interested in testing two key hypotheses:  $H_1$ : *Moral foundations should predict respondents’ votes in the 2016 election, with those having high scores on our moral foundations measure (e.g. strong preferences for authority and purity) being more likely to vote for Trump over Clinton*, and  $H_2$ : *Political system justification should predict respondents’ votes in the 2016 election. Those without strong commitments to the current political system should be more likely to vote for Trump over Clinton*. It is worth noting that although many individual-level attributes and attitudes play a powerful role in voter decision-making (e.g. party identification, ideology), we expect that moral foundations and system justification will help explain how people voted in 2016 above and beyond factors like party and ideology. Indeed, when candidates emphasize particular ideas in speeches, campaign ads, and media appearances, it becomes easier for voters to connect those ideas to their electoral choices. Federico and de Zavala (2018) make a similar argument, though they focus on collective narcissism, noting that “...the relevance of collective narcissism to the 2016 election is clear. Donald Trump’s campaign dwelled extensively on concerns expressed by collective narcissists... Those high

in national CN are likely to be mobilized by calls to restore the ingroup's greatness because they fear that others do not recognize it – and because they may doubt its greatness themselves..." (112). They find that narcissism predicts vote choice even after controlling for partisanship, ideology, and a range of other variables. The notion that some ideas and policy positions (e.g. sexism, racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, narcissism) that were emphasized during the 2016 campaigns predicted vote choice even after accounting for well-established predictors of vote choice has been illustrated in numerous studies (e.g. Federico and de Zavala 2018; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Schaffner, MacWilliams, and Nteta 2018).

Before proceeding, it is worth previewing some of our key findings. Using data from the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, we find that (1) there are important partisan and ideological differences when it comes to moral foundations and system justification, (2) moral foundations predict support for Trump even after accounting for partisanship and ideology and numerous other factors that influence moral foundations and vote choice (e.g. religiosity), and (3) contrary to our hypothesis, a measure of political system justification is not related to vote choice in our sample. At the end of the paper, we discuss ideas for future research and the implications of our results.

## Data and Measures

We use data from a module that we included in the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), a national stratified sample survey administered by YouGov.<sup>9</sup> We included numerous measures that capture moral foundations and political system justification.<sup>10</sup> More specifically, to measure the authority foundation, we asked "When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?" (with response categories being not at all relevant, not very relevant, slightly relevant, somewhat relevant, very relevant, and extremely relevant). The following considerations were included: (1) Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority, (2) Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society, and (3) Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder. We also asked respondents to read the following sentences and indicate their agreement or disagreement (with response categories being strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, and strongly agree): (1) Men and women each have differ-

<sup>9</sup> For additional information see: <https://cces.gov.harvard.edu>.

<sup>10</sup> Items are derived from the MFQ30, which is available here: <http://moralfoundations.org/questionnaires>.

ent roles to play in society, (2) If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty, and (3) Respect for authority is something all children need to learn. To measure the purity foundation, we asked respondents about the relevance of the following items (using same wording and response categories as above): (1) Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency, (2) Whether or not someone did something disgusting, and (3) Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of. We also asked people to rate their agreement or disagreement with the following items (again, using the same response categories as above): (1) People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed, (2) I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural, and (3) Chastity is an important and valuable virtue. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for these 12 items indicates a high level of reliability (0.87).<sup>11</sup> Because authority and purity are strongly related (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Kolevaa et al. 2012; Franks and Scherr 2015), we combined these items to form a single measure. Higher values should correspond to higher levels of support for Donald Trump. This variable is scaled to range from 0 to 1.

To measure political system justification, we asked respondents to rate their level of agreement with the following statements (with response categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree): The American political system is the best system there is, Checks and balances insures no government branch pursues illegal acts, Radical changes need to be made in order to have a democratic political system in our country, The political system lacks legitimacy because of the power of special interests, The two-party electoral system is democracy at its best, The political system is unfair and cannot be trusted.<sup>12</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for these items is reasonably high (0.67). We combine the items into a single measure where higher values correspond to higher levels of system justification. This variable is scaled to range from 0 to 1.

To measure vote choice, we coded votes for Trump as "1" and votes for Clinton as "0." Due to the dichotomous nature of our dependent variable, we use logistic regression in the analysis that follows. Although we are primarily interested in the two measures described above, it is important that we include a number of control variables to make sure our measures of moral foundations and system justification are not simply proxies for related variables. Importantly, we include controls for a number of predispositions that previous scholars have demonstrated are correlated with vote choice and our two independent variables of interest. More specifically, we control for ideology, partisanship, and the frequency of religious

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<sup>11</sup> The items also appear to load on one factor in a factor analysis. The first eigenvalue is 4.46 and the second is 0.88.

<sup>12</sup> The items are derived from Jost et al. (2010).

service attendance. A few examples illustrate the interconnectedness of these variables. In their study on moral foundations in the 2012 election, Franks and Scherr (2015) report that religiosity is correlated with the purity moral foundation at  $r=0.64$ . Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) report a similar correlation of  $r=0.53$ . Analyses have shown that religiosity is a strong predictor of voting for Republican candidates (Olson and Green 2006). Additionally, we note that political traits are correlated with moral foundations (and vote choice). For example, Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) find that the authority foundation correlates with ideology at  $r=0.59$  and that the purity foundation correlates with ideology at  $r=0.58$ .<sup>13</sup> Of course, political scientists have long known that an individual's ideology is highly correlated with their vote choice in presidential elections. Although they focus on different dependent variables than us, we note that Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) include a similar set of controls (e.g. religious attendance, ideology) in their models predicting issue positions. As they note, including moral foundations alongside of controls for predispositions creates a “a challenging test for the foundations” (186). Beyond these predispositions, we include standard demographic variables that are often related to vote choice, including measures of respondent sex, income, age, education, and race (McClurg and Holbrook 2009; Franks and Scherr 2015; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018). We also include measures of racial attitudes, presidential approval, and retrospective assessments of the national economy. These factors have been shown to be important predictors of presidential vote choice in many previous studies (see, e.g. McClurg and Holbrook 2009; Knuckey 2011; Holbrook, Clouse, and Weinschenk 2012; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018). Because previous research suggests that some of our control variables will be moderately or strongly related to our key independent variables (e.g. since parties are aggregators of moral preferences, controlling for partisanship at least partially controls for differences on moral issues), our approach is to first estimate a series of models that omit our key independent variables (but include the control variables outlined above) and then a series of models that add our two key variables to the equation. This allows us to assess whether the moral foundations and system justification measures make a difference above and beyond other factors in predicting support for Trump in 2016.

Before we proceed to the results, Table 1 below provides a look at the correlations among moral foundations, system justification, ideology (coded so that higher values correspond to increased conservatism), and partisanship (coded so that higher values correspond to increased identification with the Republican Party). Previous research has indicated that moral foundations and system

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<sup>13</sup> Jost et al. (2017) reports small to moderate correlations between ideology and general system justification measures.

**Table 1:** Correlations between Moral Foundations, System Justification, Ideology, and Partisanship.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Moral foundations	1.00			
(2) System justification	0.17	1.00		
(3) Ideology	0.49	0.16	1.00	
(4) Partisanship	0.29	0.10	0.60	1.00

Cell entries are Pearson's  $r$  values.

justification are related to an individual's political attitudes (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Jost et al. 2017). Overall, it appears that the moral foundations measure and ideology are highly correlated ( $r=0.49$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), with conservatives scoring higher on the moral foundations measure – which is consistent with previous work (Kolevaa et al. 2012). The correlation between partisanship and moral foundations is also positive ( $r=0.29$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), but not nearly as strong. System justification is positively correlated with ideology and partisanship, but the correlations are only  $r=0.16$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) and  $r=0.10$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), respectively. Overall, Table 1 indicates that while moral foundations, system justification, partisanship, and ideology are correlated, they are not capturing the exact same concepts.

Table 2 provides a more detailed look at the partisan and ideological differences that exist regarding our two independent variables of interest. More specifically, we show the mean levels of each variable for different partisan and ideological groups. For the sake of simplicity, we collapsed the 7-point ideology and partisanship measures into 3-point measures. For both the moral foundations and system justification measures, the range runs from 0 to 1. Overall, we

**Table 2:** Moral Foundations and System Justification Means by Partisanship and Ideology.

Groups	Moral foundations	System justification
Partisanship		
Democrat	0.57	0.47
Independent	0.62	0.43
Republican	0.70	0.52
Dem-rep diff	-0.13 ( $t=10.09$ , $p < 0.05$ )	-0.05 ( $t=3.42$ , $p < 0.05$ )
Ideology		
Liberal	0.52	0.45
Moderate	0.63	0.48
Conservative	0.72	0.51
Lib-cons diff	-0.20 ( $t=14.69$ , $p < 0.05$ )	-0.06 ( $t=4.24$ , $p < 0.05$ )

see there are fairly large differences between Democrats and Republicans and between liberals and conservatives on the moral foundations measure. Republicans have higher scores than Democrats and conservatives have higher scores than liberals. In both cases, simple difference of means tests indicate that the differences are statistically significant. Interestingly, the difference between liberals and conservatives ( $-0.20, t=14.69$ ) is larger than the difference between Democrats and Republicans ( $-0.13, t=10.09$ ). The partisan and ideological differences we find in Table 2 are consistent with previous research on the political underpinnings of moral foundations (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). When we examine the partisan and ideological differences on the system justification measure, we again find some differences. Republicans and conservatives have higher scores than Democrats and liberals. Although difference of means tests again indicate that the means are significantly different from one another, the substantive differences across groups are much smaller compared to the differences that exist when it comes to moral foundations.

## Results and Analysis

Table 3 provides a look at the results from our logistic regression models. Model 1 simply examines the bivariate relationship between moral foundations and vote choice. The measure has a positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) effect on vote choice, which is what we expected. Model 2 provides a look at a vote choice model that includes our control variables, but that omits the moral foundations index. In general, the variables perform as expected. Respondent ideology, partisanship, religiosity, attitudes about the economy, racial attitudes, and presidential approval ratings are all statistically significant and strongly related to vote choice in 2016. Model 3 elaborates on Model 2 by adding the moral foundations measure to the equation. Thus, we can see whether it has a significant effect on vote choice above and beyond important predictors of vote choice. The results for Model 3 indicate that moral foundations have a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) effect on support for Trump even in the presence of controls for predispositions like ideology, party, and religiosity that are correlated with moral foundations.<sup>14</sup> It is worth pointing out that the magnitude of the moral foundations coefficient decreases from Model 1 to Model 3, but the effect remains statistically significant nonetheless. As Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) note, it is actually quite impressive that

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<sup>14</sup> If we re-estimate Model 3 but remove partisanship, ideology, and religiosity, we, unsurprisingly, find that the magnitude of the moral foundations effect increases ( $b=5.52, s.e.=1.93, p=0.002, one-tailed$ ).

**Table 3:** Logistic Regression Models of Vote Choice in 2016.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Moral foundations	4.882*		2.964*				3.039*
	(0.713)		(1.653)				(1.669)
System justification				-0.021		-0.542	-0.707
				(0.555)		(1.582)	(1.499)
Male		0.633	0.692		0.633	0.617	0.670
		(0.572)	(0.566)		(0.572)	(0.569)	(0.556)
Age		-0.043*	-0.051*		-0.043*	-0.042*	-0.049*
		(0.018)	(0.019)		(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Education		-0.583*	-0.538*		-0.583*	-0.566*	-0.516*
		(0.190)	(0.190)		(0.190)	(0.190)	(0.188)
Religiosity		0.382*	0.294*		0.382*	0.381*	0.293*
		(0.162)	(0.142)		(0.162)	(0.162)	(0.142)
Income		0.067	0.069		0.067	0.065	0.067
		(0.081)	(0.083)		(0.081)	(0.080)	(0.081)
Ideology		0.642*	0.479*		0.642*	0.646*	0.480*
		(0.232)	(0.214)		(0.232)	(0.230)	(0.213)
Partisanship		0.363*	0.412*		0.363*	0.366*	0.418*
		(0.165)	(0.168)		(0.165)	(0.165)	(0.168)
Black		-4.245*	-4.197*		-4.245*	-4.243*	-4.217*
		(1.467)	(1.513)		(1.467)	(1.470)	(1.521)
Hispanic		-2.507*	-2.104		-2.507*	-2.507*	-2.087
		(1.499)	(1.508)		(1.499)	(1.500)	(1.510)
White		-0.442	-0.176		-0.442	-0.429	-0.159
		(1.048)	(1.125)		(1.048)	(1.052)	(1.127)
National economy		0.611*	0.621*		0.611*	0.596*	0.603*
		(0.287)	(0.276)		(0.287)	(0.283)	(0.272)
Obama approval		1.958*	1.958*		1.958*	1.955*	1.954*
		(0.361)	(0.364)		(0.361)	(0.360)	(0.362)
Racial attitudes		0.293*	0.293*		0.293*	0.296*	0.299*
		(0.133)	(0.129)		(0.133)	(0.132)	(0.129)
Constant	-3.164*	-10.115*	-11.245*	-0.006	-10.115*	-9.970*	-11.105*
	(0.441)	(2.219)	(2.571)	(0.301)	(2.219)	(2.245)	(2.586)
N	520	520	520	520	520	520	520
Pseudo R-squared	0.12	0.83	0.83	0.00	0.83	0.83	0.83

\*p &lt; 0.05, one-tailed.

moral foundations have predictive power after accounting for related predispositions. Model 4 provides a look at the bivariate relationship between the system justification measure and vote choice. Contrary to our expectations, the measure does not have a statistically significant effect on vote choice in our sample. Model 5 again shows a basic vote choice without the moral foundations or system jus-

tification items. When we add the system justification measure to the model (results shown in Model 6), the measure remains statistically insignificant. Model 7 includes both the moral foundations and system justification measures, which were only moderately correlated with each other in Table 1, along with all of the control variables. Importantly, the moral foundations measure has a positive and statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) effect on vote choice in 2016 even after accounting for system justification and other important factors related to vote choice. The system justification measures remains insignificant in Model 7. In order to get a sense of the substantive effect of moral foundations on support for Trump, Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities of voting for Trump as the moral foundations index moves from its lowest to highest value. After controlling for the other variables in the model, the predicted probability that those with the lowest score on the moral foundations measure voted for Trump in 2016 is 0.43 and the predicted probability that those with the highest score on the measure voted for Trump is 0.53, a difference of 10 points.

In addition to these analyses, we wanted to briefly explore the whether partisanship or ideology influenced the weight placed on moral foundations when people were deciding how to vote in 2016. Was the effect of moral foundations on vote choice in 2016 more pronounced among certain partisan or ideological groups? While we showed that there are partisan and ideological differences in moral foundations, it could also be the case that the relationship between our moral foundations measure and vote choice is stronger among certain groups in the electorate than others. In their recent paper on vote choice in 2016, Hooghe and Dassonneville (2018) found some evidence that the effects of anti-immigrant

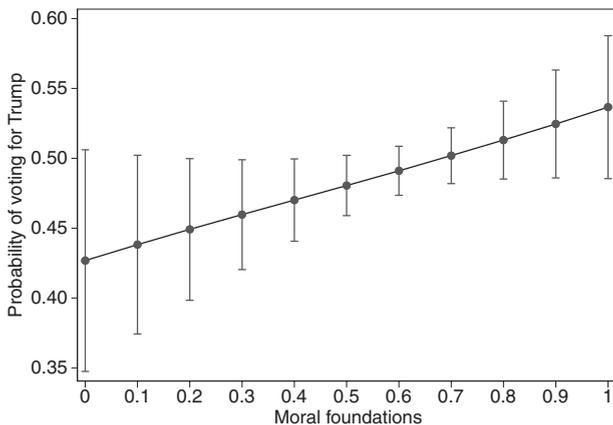


Figure 1: Substantive Effect of Moral Foundations Measure (from Model 7 in Table 3).

sentiment and racial resentment were stronger among some partisan groups than others. To explore this idea, we developed a series of interaction models. In one model, we interacted the moral foundations index with partisanship and in another we interacted moral foundations with ideology. The interaction terms provide an indication of whether the effect of moral foundations varies depending on one's partisan or ideological attachments. The results of the interaction models are shown in the Online Appendix. As a brief overview, we find little evidence to suggest that the effect of our moral foundation measure on vote choice varied by partisanship or ideology. Our results do not rule out the possibility that other individual predispositions influence the weight applied to moral foundations when people are deciding how to vote, and we encourage additional research on this question.

## Discussion

In this paper, we examined the role of two important psychological theories in explaining support for Donald Trump in 2016. Our results indicated that a measure of political system justification was not related to support for Trump in our sample. This is an interesting finding given the idea that part of what motivated people to vote for Trump was dissatisfaction with the political system and their belief that Trump would shake-up “business as usual.” This fits well with work by Hooghe and Dassonneville (2018), who found that neither a measure of political trust nor a measure of satisfaction with democracy were related to support for Trump in 2016. This casts doubt on the idea that support for Trump was mostly about protesting the political system. It is possible that other measures of dissatisfaction with government are related to vote choice in 2016, but our analysis did not uncover much support for the idea that political system justification was relevant to voter decision-making.

We did find evidence that support for Trump was influenced by psychological predispositions related to morality. Moral foundations remained an important predictor of vote choice even after controlling for numerous other factors. Although “fundamental” variables like ideology, partisanship, and economic assessments were important to vote choice in 2016, it is also clear that voters integrated other considerations into their decision calculus. Moral foundations clearly played a role in the 2016 presidential election. Thus, this paper adds to the growing body of research showing that psychological concepts and theories are important in understanding voter decision-making in the 2016 presidential election and in elections more generally.

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