No Compromise: Political Consequences of Moralized Attitudes*

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September 27, 2013

Abstract

Evolutionary, neuroscientific, and cognitive perspectives in psychology have converged on the idea that some attitudes are moralized—a distinctive characteristic. Moralized attitudes reorient behavior from maximizing gains to adhering to rules. Here, I examine a political consequence of this tendency. In four studies drawing data from a variety of sources, I measure attitude moralization and examine how it relates to approval of political compromise. I find that moralized attitudes lead citizens to oppose compromises, punish compromising politicians, and even pay a monetary cost to obstruct political opponents’ gain. These patterns emerge on social and economic issues alike and have implications for understanding political polarization.

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“To the man of rigid morality . . . it is better not to agree at all than to agree to an imperfect bargain” (Dahl 1967, 53).

In August of 2011, President Obama signed legislation providing for cuts to discretionary spending to go into effect in 2013. The reductions were to affect a host of popular programs: Medicare, scientific research, the military, education, housing assistance, and food and drug safety would all have to show significant reductions. Moreover, the cuts were to be indiscriminate; administrators would have almost no discretion with which to prioritize crucial programs over dispensable ones.

Initially, the rash nature of the cuts was thought to be a virtue: they were so clearly suboptimal and so unpalatable to Democrats and Republicans alike that they would never take effect. Instead, they were a specter designed to give the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction the cover and impetus to craft a meaningful compromise that would address looming fiscal problems. The Committee’s mandate was unprecedented: its proposal would be guaranteed an up-or-down vote in both houses of Congress, immune from amendment, filibuster, and party gatekeeping obstacles. But incredibly, the Committee never offered a proposal, unable to bridge internal divisions. As the budget sequestration took effect, Peter Welch, the representative from Vermont, remarked, “One hundred percent of Congress opposed it, and we’re doing it. That’s a sign of a dysfunctional institution” (quoted in Weisman 2013, A3).

Several accounts suggest that the inability to reach a compromise to avert the budget sequester is symptomatic of a polarized period in American politics (e.g. Mann and Ornstein 2012). Indeed, there is evidence that members have become more ideologically distant, that party labels have become more congruent with issue positions, that discourse has become less civil, and that obstructionism has become more common (Herbst 2010; Levendusky 2009; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2008; Theriault 2008). In spite of this, some aspects of the polarization phenomenon remain puzzling. For instance, an implication of spatial models of policymaking (e.g. Cox and McCubbins 2005; Krehbiel 1998) is that if the status quo is abhorrent to both parties, they should be able to enact something preferable, even if it is neither’s ideal.

Here, I examine a potential link between elite polarization and the “electoral connection” (Mayhew 1974). I entertain the idea that, separate from policy preferences, citizens have meaningful opinions about the style in which their representatives should act: whether they should cooperate with opponents, bargain over policy, and, in a word, compromise.

The possibility is certainly not preordained, as existing studies find citizens’ opinions about procedural matters to be relatively undeveloped. For instance, citizens do not seem to exhibit firm opinions on the desirability of divided government (Geer et al. 2004; Nicholson 2005). Teaching constitutional principles such as due process and freedom of expression does little to increase support for civil liberties (Green et al.
More broadly, it is easy to imagine opinions about compromise being epiphenomenal—emerging backwards out of partisan or other attachments (Sniderman et al. 1986).

Recent work in moral psychology, however, gives many hints that opinions about compromise could be part of a deeper and more interesting psychological regularity. Several perspectives have converged on the notion that the feelings and judgments we commonly associate with morality are quite distinctive in character. They engage mental systems that regulate adherence to perceived duties and prohibitions (Baron and Spranca 1997; Haidt, Koller and Dias 1993; Skitka 2010; Tetlock 2003). They orient evaluative processes away from maximizing gains and toward adherence to rules of conduct (e.g. Bennis, Medin and Bartels 2010). They evoke powerful emotions, especially toward divergent opinions (Haidt 2003b). And scholars argue that they have an evolutionary (DeScioli and Kurzban 2013; Sinnott-Armstrong 2007a; Tooby and Cosmides 2010) and neural (e.g. Berns et al. 2012; Greene et al. 2001; Moll and de Oliveira-Souza 2007; Sinnott-Armstrong 2007b) basis.

This article leverages improvements in the conception and measurement of moral attitudes to assess the idea that they distort the process by which citizens evaluate political compromises. Citizens might typically approach compromise in a rationalistic framework (cf. Downs 1957) in which losses and benefits of given proposals are weighed against the status-quo. This mindset is conducive to compromise because losses in one area can be offset by gains in another. In contrast, morally convicted attitudes are, in a sense, beyond compromise. Since this mindset makes some preferences absolute, it could shrink the set of acceptable compromises and make it more likely that compromising politicians can expect punishment at the ballot box.

I test these ideas in four studies that draw from a mixture of nationally representative and convenience samples. In Study 1, I measure the propensity to hold moralized political attitudes and compare it to partisan and other attachments as a predictor of opposition to the abstract notion of compromise. Study 2 then looks at specific compromises, comparing moralization to other attitude characteristics (extremity, importance, personal relevance) in terms of how they precipitate resistance to bargains on specific issues. Study 3 examines the relationship between moral conviction and vote choice, finding that moral conviction predicts opposition to a candidate who is expected to negotiate with political opponents. Study 4 provides subjects a benefit if they allow a political opponent also to benefit—a dynamic that captures the essence of compromise. Here, individuals with moralized political attitudes pay an actual monetary cost just to obstruct opponents’ gain.

An experiment embedded into Study 4 also examines the extent to which the consequences of moral conviction depend on situational elicitors, an investigation important to understand its broader political implications. I find that rhetorical appeals whose language emphasizes moral considerations evoke uncom-
promising behavior from some individuals not typically inclined toward it.

Thus, I find considerable evidence that moral intuitions influence how citizens respond to compromise in real and consequential ways. I conclude with a discussion of the broader implications of this finding, including the possible relationship between moral conviction and political polarization.

The Psychology of Moral Attitudes

The idea that attitudes are multidimensional has long played a role in the study of politics. Robert Dahl’s classic study of democratic theory, for instance, argues that analysts need to consider two properties of an attitude separately: its content and the intensity with which it is held (1956, ch. 4). In the intervening years, psychologists enriched this perspective considerably. Attitudes differ in the extent to which they are extreme, important, elaborated, accessible, certain, conscious, and several other properties (Abelson 1988; Petty and Krosnick 1995, for helpful overviews).

A subset of attitudes engage a suite of mental processes that we experience as morality (e.g. Baron and Spranca 1997; Ditto, Pizarro and Tannenbaum 2009; Fiske and Tetlock 1997; Haidt and Kesebir 2010; Mikhail 2007; Skitka, Bauman and Sargis 2005). These attitudes are perceived as objective and universally true—standards that others should share (Skitka 2010). They evoke moral emotions, such as guilt, disgust, and contempt (Haidt 2003b; Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek 2007). They elicit the monitoring and judgment of others’ actions (Kurzban 2011, ch 9). These attitudes are likely to be extreme, but they are more than that, for only a small number of extreme attitudes are moralized. To see the difference, compare a nonmoral preference—“I don’t like Brussels sprouts”—to one that, for many people, is moralized—“I don’t like to clean my bathroom with an American flag.” A dislike of Brussels sprouts can be arbitrarily extreme, but unlike cleaning a bathroom with a patriotic symbol, it is easier to imagine reasonable disagreement and harder to imagine someone else’s violation inspiring anger or contempt.

A distinctive characteristic of moralized attitudes is that, pitted against other attitudes, they resist processing through a cost/benefit framework (Baron and Spranca 1997; Bennis, Medin and Bartels 2010; Fiske and Tetlock 1997; Tetlock 2000; Tetlock et al. 2000). There are several vivid illustrations. For instance, dozens of studies on so-called “Runaway trolley problems” present subjects with hypothetical dilemmas in

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1For recent views on the evolutionary origins of moralized attitudes, see Boehm (2012); DeScioli and Kurzban (2009, 2013); Wilson and Wilson (2008). For studies that find moralized attitudes to elicit distinctive neural patterns, see Berns et al. (2012); Greene et al. (2001); Greene (2007b); Moll et al. (2002); Moll and de Oliveira-Souza (2007); Moll et al. (2005).

2Moralized attitudes are also distinguishable from social norms. An authority figure can lift a social norm (e.g. “Don’t wear pajamas to school”), but not not a moral mandate (“Don’t hit your classmate”) (Smetana 1983; more broadly, see Fiddick 2004 and Turiel 1998).
which they can sacrifice one life to save several. Subjects overwhelmingly endorse doing so when it involves a non-moralized action (e.g. flipping a switch to make the trolley run on a different track) but not when it involves a moral prohibition (e.g. pushing someone off a bridge onto the train tracks) (Greene 2007a, for a review). Subjects asked whether they would open a river dam to save twenty species of fish from extinction if doing so would cause the extinction of two other species said they would not, since they would not want to “cause” the death of any species (Ritov and Baron 1999). Asked whether it would be permissible to eat a family dog who died after being hit by a car, subjects express shocked revulsion, even if it is stipulated that dog meat might be delicious (Haidt, Koller and Dias 1993). Atran and colleagues find that, when it comes to negotiating over a “sacred” issue (land division between Israelis and Palestinians), incorporating material incentives into a concession backfires, increasing support for violent opposition (Atran, Axelrod and Davis 2007; Ginges et al. 2007).

These empirical demonstrations coincide with more commonplace observations. Consider what benefits (barring a pathology) a genuine patriot would accept to defile his country’s flag? A scientist to forge data? A law-abiding citizen to lie in court or accept an expensive gift she knew to be stolen? A religious person to vandalize her place of worship? A parent to harm his children? The obstacle to these tradeoffs is not that they are costly; it is that they preclude considering cost. To seriously contemplate them is, in Tetlock’s (2003, 320) words, to “think the unthinkable.”

Moral Attitudes in Politics

In two important ways, the new psychological synthesis concerning morality revises the political science assumptions about where moral thinking will arise. First, Converse (1964) convincingly demonstrated that most citizens do not approach the political world with developed ideological frameworks, a finding that could be taken to preclude the notion that they really think about morality. This framework, however, assumes moral convictions to be rational, deductive, and internally consistent. In contrast, recent psychological work finds moral convictions to be primarily intuitive and emotional (Haidt 2001, 2012). For instance, many subjects cannot explain why they believe it would be wrong to consume a family pet after it died of natural causes—they cannot articulate what principle this view derives from—but they exhibit strong negative emotional reactions to the proposition nonetheless (Haidt, Koller and Dias 1993). Thus, citizens might have moralized attitudes even if they cannot explain—or wrongly explain3—the basis of the moralization. In addition, moral convictions might be surprisingly detached from things often assumed to be precursors of

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3Abundant work in psychology finds people to be adept at rationalizing their intuitions on the fly (e.g. Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Uhlmann et al. 2009).
a moral disposition, such as endorsement of certain values (e.g. egalitarianism, individualism) or religious devotion.

Second, but related, where political scientists have sought to identify a role for moral thinking in politics, they often assume that moral processing naturally coincides with specific topics, such as abortion, the death penalty, capital punishment, school prayer, or same-sex marriage (e.g. Engeli, Green-Pedersen and Larsen 2012; Studlar 2001; Tavits 2007). Economic issues are assumed to evoke fundamentally different patterns of thought, and thus to be intrinsically nonmoral (e.g. Tatalovich and Daynes 2011, xxxiii). But the distinction between social and economic issues is socially constructed, not a natural kind, so there is little reason to expect it to coincide neatly with innate brain processes. Motivated by this observation, Ryan (N.d.), using the same measurement paradigm as described below, directly measures moral conviction on an array of both economic and social issues. In both domains, he finds tremendous within-issue variation in terms of whether it is evaluated with moral conviction. In short, where political science scholarship has long considered moral attitudes to be deductive, constrained, and consistent across individuals, there is good reason to consider them as intuitive, atomized, and variable across individuals.

How does a particular attitude become moralized for a particular person? Although findings on this point are less certain (Skitka in press, for a discussion), there is reason to believe that social milieu can do much to inculcate convictions on specific topics (e.g. Shweder, Mahapatra and Miller 1990), an idea that, on reflection, seems to echo throughout political life. Some topics, such as collective bargaining rights, can easily be construed as a simple clash of economic interests, but seem to be moralized for some individuals (e.g. labor union members and some sympathizers). Others, such as same-sex marriage, are often cited as inherently moral, but are actually discussed in terms of expected consequences (rather than first principles) surprisingly often (Mucciaroni 2011). Additionally, there appears to be substantial variation in how topics are moralized across time and place. Smoking in public was once entirely mundane, but now inspires disgust from many Americans (Rozin 1999). Across cultures, various local taboos cause certain sexual acts or the consumption of particular foods to evoke contempt and punitive sentiments in some places, but not others (e.g. Fessler and Navarrete 2003, 2004).

**Political Consequences of Moralization**

Moralized attitudes lead people to make surprising choices when it comes to hypotheticals such as the above-mentioned trolley, fish, and deceased pet problems, but the artificial nature of these dilemmas makes their political implications difficult to divine. It might be that intuitions about morality impose on decision making only under narrow circumstances, such as when a researcher contrives a scenario to put a desire to adhere to
rules and a desire to maximize gains on a collision course. Then again, it also seems plausible that as citizens experience the everyday give and take of politics, they encounter conceptual analogs to the fish, trolley, and deceased pet problems that evoke a similar style of thinking. The idea here is that, at least for some people, there is a kind of comparability between the psychological processes invoked when one considers pushing a bystander onto hypothetical trolley tracks and certain moralized political symbols.

Exactly how moralized processing might unfold in politics is a matter ripe for investigation, and there are a number of plausible hypotheses. Perhaps political candidates who hold certain policy positions on moralized topics are especially likely to evoke disgust and contempt. Perhaps one’s level of moral conviction makes the difference between the sort of citizen who cares about the political opinions of others and strives to police them, and a citizen who cares about politics, but instead adopts a “live and let live” mentality. Political scientists have long puzzled over what motivates citizens to vote despite the unlikelihood of any one ballot being pivotal (e.g. Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Perhaps the moralized flavor of certain attitudes is helpful in surmounting this apparent cost/benefit obstacle (cf. Ryan N.d.).

The present work focuses on one overarching hypothesis: that moralized attitudes orient citizens to oppose political compromises. An important part of this idea is that, given how detached citizens’ opinions about compromise are from tangible consequences—one vote is seldom pivotal and effects of one policy versus another are difficult to discern—compromises are frequently evaluated as symbols. They are processed as much in terms of what they stand for—progress, but also concession—as their likely effects. I present more specific hypotheses as they relate to each empirical investigation below.

Measuring Moral Attitudes

Measuring whether an attitude is moralized presents some challenges. The problem is hard because, as I discuss above, moralization probably does not arise from any deductive belief system. Moreover, given that humans have limited introspective powers and are adept at manufacturing false rationales on the fly (Nisbett and Wilson 1977), asking them to elaborate on the reasons that underlie a particular opinion is likely to generate both false positives and false negatives (Skitka and Bauman 2008, 36, for a discussion).

Linda Skitka and colleagues have developed a measurement approach that takes advantage of the fact that, although individuals lack introspective access to reasons for their opinions, they do seem consciously and reliably to have a visceral perception that certain attitudes have a moral basis. Their Moral Conviction measure asks subjects to report, typically on a five-point scale, “To what extent is your position on [attitude...
object] a reflection of your core moral beliefs and convictions” and “... connected to your beliefs about fundamental right and wrong?” This measurement approach has been validated across many studies, and been found to have discriminant validity with respect to other attitude characteristics, as well as political orientation, political extremity, and cognitive rigidity (Skitka 2010; Skitka, Bauman and Sargis 2005; Wisneski, Skitka and Morgan 2011, for discussions). Applied to an array of political attitudes, it is correlated with, but distinct from, other attitude characteristics (extremity, importance, personal relevance). It distinctly predicts negative emotions—especially punitive sentiments—toward political opposition (Ryan N.d.).

One question that comes up in studying how moral conviction arises in politics is the granularity with which it should be measured. On one hand, the atomized nature of moral conviction suggests that it be measured with reference to specific attitude objects, since even closely related objects seem to differ in terms of whether they are perceived as morally relevant (e.g. Haidt 2007, 999). But as Robert Abelson (1988, 270) notes, it could simultaneously be true that “[the] characteristic level of conviction on a large range of issues is an individual difference variable.” Consistent with this idea, Ryan (N.d.) finds that individuals vary in their overall propensity to moralize political issues and that the variance predicts a “one-sided” view of politics.

For present purposes, I conceive moral conviction much like physical fitness: a property that has some aspects that are specific (as in arm versus leg strength) and others that are general (as in people who are more or less fit). I shall measure it as a general propensity where the dependent measure is general in nature (Study 1), but with reference to specific issues where the dependent measure concerns specific issues (Studies 2–4).

**Study 1 – Compromise in the Abstract**

Study 1 examines compromise as a symbol, detached from particular issues. Conceived this way, Americans feel conflicted about compromise. In 2010, when the Pew Research Center asked them if they more admire “political leaders who make compromises with people they disagree with” or “political leaders who stick to their positions without compromising,” 42% preferred the former and 49% preferred the latter (Pew 2010).\(^5\) The hypothesis is that part of citizens’ orientation toward political compromise comes from their propensity to develop moralized views of political issues. For individuals with a high proportion of moralized attitudes, considering compromises will habitually recruit mental systems—negative emotions and appraisals—oriented to reject compromise. Of course, one must be cognizant of the fact that opinion about the abstract notion of compromise might look markedly different from how citizens respond to specific compromises, but I postpone

\(^5\)Just a few years earlier, the split was 51% in favor of compromise, compared to 40% in favor of sticking to positions (Pew 2007), suggesting a notable increase in resistance to compromise over time.
the latter question for studies 2–4.

**Data and measures** Data come from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES) Evaluations of Government and Society Study (EGSS) February, 2012 Survey. The EGSS was administered online by Knowledge Networks (now GfK Research), which uses random-digit-dial and address-based sampling methods to construct a nationally representative sample. It has 1,314 respondents and includes a poststratification weight designed to generalize to overall population. The analyses below are weighted to reflect the national population.

The EGSS included innovative instrumentation designed to measure individuals’ propensity to moralize political issues, and to do so in a way that distinguishes moralization from a propensity to see many issues as important. Respondents were presented a list of ten political issues: the budget deficit, the war in Afghanistan, education, health care, illegal immigration, the economic recession, abortion, same-sex marriage, the environment, and unemployment. They were asked to choose which of the issues is the most important one facing the United States. Then, they were asked which issue is the least important. Finally, using one of the moral conviction questions described above, subjects’ moral conviction was gauged with respect to three issues: the one deemed most important, the one deemed least important, and a randomly selected third issue. In this way, it is possible to sketch the distribution of moralization over attitudes that an individuals deems both important and unimportant. The Propensity to moralize measure is simply an average of the three responses (α = .70). Wisneski et al. (2011) and Morgan et al. (2010) present validation information on this approach.

The EGSS also measured, in a style similar to the Pew surveys referenced above, attitudes about compromise. Respondents were asked, “would you prefer a U.S. president who compromises to get things done, or who sticks to his or her principles no matter what?”6 (The two alternatives mentioned in the question were the only response options.) Then, after several intervening questions, they were asked the identical question, but with reference to “a representative in the U.S. Congress.” The EGSS dataset also includes a political knowledge battery, a series of questions on religious affiliation, and standard information on respondents’ partisanship, ideology, gender, age, and education. The Supplementary Information (§1.1) contains coding information on all measures used for analysis.7

There is no established understanding of what preferences and traits underlie attitudes toward political

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6One might worry that respondents had in mind a specific president (i.e. Barack Obama) as they contemplated this question. However, the question was asked in the heat of the 2012 presidential campaign, making this reading less likely. Moreover, the results in Table 1 find little evidence of it. (Strength of Republican identification predicts support for a compromising representative almost exactly the same as a compromising president.)

7The Supplementary Information is available online at www.timothyjryan.com.
compromise. As such, Table 1 presents a fairly rich model that allows relationships with several familiar measures to emerge. It examines whether the strength of partisan or ideological attachments lead individuals to oppose concession. I estimate the relationship for strength of Democratic identification and strength of Republican identification separately, since these symbolic traits might have distinguishable effects. Similarly, when it comes to ideology, I allow Liberalism and Conservatism to have different slopes. On the idea that politically engaged people might be more worried about gridlock and therefore more likely to endorse compromise, I include a scale of Political knowledge and a self-report of how often the respondent follows what's going on in politics. On the idea that religious organizations might inculcate both moral conviction and an orientation toward political compromise, I include a self-report of whether the respondent is Religious. I also include gender (Female) and Age as demographic controls. All variables are scaled to run 0–1 and, as the dependent variable is binary, the model is estimated by probit.

**Results**  Table 1 uncovers considerable evidence, consistent with the hypothesis, that the propensity to hold moralized political attitudes plays a role in citizens’ orientation toward political compromise. Moralized attitudes significantly predict opposition a compromising president \((p<.06)\) as well as a compromising representative \((p<.03)\). Remarkably, the relationship between moralization and the dependent variables is larger and more consistent than the relationship for (notoriously dominant) strength of partisanship, suggesting that endorsement of political compromise might indeed be moored more strongly in visceral affective responses than these social identities.

The results point to a few other relationships worthy of note. Political knowledge predicts support for compromise in the expected way. Conservatism strongly predicts opposition to compromise, likely reflective of the fact that the survey took place against a backdrop of firm Republican opposition to policies that Democratic politicians attempted to frame as centrist. Age predicts support for compromise, perhaps reflective of a preference for conciliatory politics as one gets older.

I test the robustness of results in Table 1 in a number of ways. To examine whether the moralization relationship is specific to one partisan or ideological stripe, I estimate models in which the moralization variable is interacted with dummy variables for being a Republican and being conservative. The results are suggestive of the idea that the relationship is strongest among citizens on the right side of the political spectrum, but none of the interactions is significant \(\text{all } p > .18\). I also estimate a model that excludes the political engagement measures \((\text{Political Knowledge and Follow Politics})\). Confidence that the coefficient on the moralization variable is nonzero increases slightly in each case. The Supplementary Information \((§1.2)\) reports all of these results.
Table 1: Propensity to Moralize Lessens Support for Compromise

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Representative</th>
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<td>Propensity to moralize</td>
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<td>-0.429**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.184)</td>
<td>(0.189)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.202)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.240)</td>
<td>(0.268)</td>
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<td>-0.709***</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.198)</td>
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<td>Pol. Knowledge</td>
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<td>0.333*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.199)</td>
<td>(0.198)</td>
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<td>Follow Politics</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.189)</td>
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<td></td>
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Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<.10

Table 1: Weighted probit models. All variables coded 0–1.
Study 2 – Responses to Specific Compromises

Political ideals are easier to endorse than to apply. Americans preach tolerance, but have rather more difficulty tolerating groups they dislike (Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997; Sullivan, Piereson and Marcus 1979). They demand spending cuts, but balk at cuts to specific programs (Jacoby 2000). It appears to be much the same with compromise. Asked whether Republicans and Democrats should compromise on the environment, illegal immigration, federal taxes, and abortion, support never surpasses 54%, and is as low as 25%—a far cry from the 75% who say they admire political leaders who are willing to compromise (Pew 2007).

Study 2 examines what leads people not simply to endorse the idea of compromise, but to accept actual compromises. I compare moral conviction to three other attitude characteristics: extremity, importance, and personal relevance. Extremity is “the degree to which the favorability of an individual’s attitude diverges from neutral” (Wegener et al. 1995, 465). Importance is “a person’s perception of the amount of personal importance he or she attaches to an attitude” (467). Personal relevance is “the extent to which people believe that a topic or attitude object holds significant consequences for some aspects of their lives” (470). The conceptual distinctions between these concepts is sometimes subtle, but real. We can all think of issues that little affect us, but which we care about quite deeply, or ones where we have an extreme opinion that is nonetheless of secondary importance. Empirically the properties are correlated, but separable (Krosnick et al. 1993). They also have distinct consequences (e.g. Krosnick 1988). The studies below measure them using standard approaches reviewed by Wegener et al. (1995).

Ex ante, it is not clear how different attitude characteristics should influence a person’s orientation toward compromise. Pew (2007) suggests that “openness to compromise is inversely linked to the importance people place on the issue,” an idea with some plausibility, although it is not clear if “importance” refers to caring about an issue, or instead having a stake in its outcome. Moreover, one can also imagine the reverse possibility: perhaps issues that are in some sense important are exactly where compromise will be most valued, since compromise can resolve a crippling impasse. (A senior citizen worried that political brinksmanship might forestall her Social Security benefits, or a devout student concerned that a school’s policy will prevent her from praying during the day, might highly value compromise.)

The hypothesis is that different attitude characteristics relate to compromise in different ways, with moral conviction being a particularly potent obstacle to compromise.

Data and measures I draw data from two complementary convenience samples. First, a researcher visited political science course sections at a large research university and administered a questionnaire to
undergraduates as part of an in-class activity (N=217). Second, a nearly identical questionnaire was administered to a somewhat larger sample (N=472) of American workers on Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk crowdsourcing service. The questionnaires were administered in November and December of 2012.

The questionnaires measured attitudes with respect to five political issues, which were presented in a random order: Social Security reform, collective bargaining rights, stem cell research, same-sex marriage, and the presence of American troops in Afghanistan. These issues were chosen to examine an array of topics that are both putatively moral and nonmoral.

For each issue, subjects were asked to consider two possible approaches—one identifiably liberal in character, and one conservative. For instance, the Social Security topic asked:

*As you may know, the Social Security program in the United States is projected to run out of funds in 2033 if changes are not made. One idea that has been proposed to address the problem is to raise taxes on people currently in the work force. Alternatively, some people have proposed cutting back on the benefits the government provides future retirees. How about you? Would you prefer to see taxes raised to preserve benefits at the current level, or would you prefer to cut benefits so taxes don’t have to go up?*

Preferences for one option over the other were recorded on a seven-point scale with a neutral point. To construct a measure of attitude Extremity, these responses were folded at the midpoint. Importance is measured by the follow-up question, “how important is this issue to you personally?” Relevance is measured by another follow-up: “how much does the outcome of this issue directly affect you?” Moral Conviction was measured using Skitka’s moral conviction battery as applied to each issue (so five times in total).

The Supplementary Information reports all correlations between these measures (§2.3 and §2.4) as well as a principal factor analysis finding Moral Conviction to be distinguishable from the other characteristics (§2.5 and §2.6). It also reports all question wordings (§2.2).

After attitudes about all five issues were recorded, subjects moved on to a new section of the survey. They were asked, without prior warning, to evaluate a plausible compromise concerning each of the already-considered issues. For instance, the Social Security prompt read

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8Evidence of Mechanical Turk’s usefulness for research continues to mount (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz 2012; Buhrmeister, Kwang and Gosling 2011). Moreover, researchers continue to develop tools to address some of its liabilities (Pe’er et al. 2012). In the present study, I employ an attention check that ensure subjects are cognitively engaged in the study, as well as an html script that ensures any particular subject can only appear in the sample once.

9The Supplementary Information reports sample demographics (§2.1).

10It was measured using three questions in the student sample. For the MTurk sample, the third question was dropped to shorten the questionnaire. (Results from the student sample suggested the construct could be measured satisfactorily with two items.) Across the five issues, Cronbach’s α ranges from .90 to .93 in the student sample and .85 to .92 in the MTurk sample.
Please think once more about the Social Security shortfall mentioned in the previous section. As you recall, the Social Security fund will not be able to meet its obligations in the future if changes are not made. Some people propose raising taxes on people currently in the work force. Others propose cutting back on benefits the government provides to future retirees. Suppose there were a proposal in Congress to address the Social Security shortfall with a mixture of the two approaches. Some tax deductions would end and, as a result, most people would pay more. But benefits scheduled for people more than five years away from retirement would decrease, also serving to bridge the shortfall. Would you favor such a proposal, oppose it, or neither favor nor oppose it?

Responses to these prompts were recorded on a seven-point scale that ranged from “strongly favor” to “strongly oppose.”

For the primary analysis, all variables were scaled to run 0–1. To estimate the relationship for Moral Conviction as separated from the idiosyncrasies of a particular issue, I pool all responses and estimate (OLS):

\[
\text{Compromise} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Extremity} + \beta_2 \text{Importance} + \beta_3 \text{Relevance} + \beta_4 \text{Moral Conviction} + \\
\beta_{\{5,6,7,8\}} \text{issue fixed effects} + \beta_{k \in \{9,10,\ldots,l\}} \text{respondent fixed effects} + \epsilon,
\]

where \(l\) is determined by the sample size.\(^\text{11}\)

**Results** The results, presented in Table 2, suggest that attitude characteristics relate to compromise in a textured way. An extreme attitude significantly predicts opposition to compromise (\(p < 0.001\) in both samples), as does an important attitude, although the relationship is a bit more tentative (\(p < 0.001\) for Students; \(p < 0.08\) for MTurkers). Relevance exhibits no appreciable relationship to the dependent variable in either sample.

The results also support the hypothesis that moral conviction evokes opposition to compromise above and beyond other attitude characteristics, as the coefficients are highly significant in both samples. Indeed, the relationship appears to be only a bit less prominent than that between attitude Extremity and compromise.

\(^{11}\)One concern with this model might be that \(\beta_4\) would vary markedly if estimated separately for each issue. If this were true, a significant effect in the pooled sample could be attributable to a powerful effect within one issue that is absent in other issues. To test this possibility, I estimate a system of seemingly unrelated regressions (Greene 2008, 254) in which slopes are constrained to be equal, but also one in which slopes can vary by issue. In both datasets, the variable-slope system offers no significant improvement of fit. Moreover, when relationships are estimated separately for each issue, the coefficient on Moral Conviction is never positive.
Table 2: Moral Conviction Lessens Support for Specific Compromises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>MTurk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremity</td>
<td>-0.187***</td>
<td>-0.198***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>-0.170***</td>
<td>-0.059*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Conviction</td>
<td>-0.145***</td>
<td>-0.123***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue Fixed Effects</td>
<td>Included</td>
<td>Included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Fixed Effects</td>
<td>Included</td>
<td>Included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.646***</td>
<td>0.531***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<.10

Table 2: OLS models. All variables coded 0–1. The dependent variable is approval of compromise.
It is possibly more prominent than the relationship between attitude Importance and compromise, although standard errors of the estimates makes it difficult to be certain.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, Study 2 lends nuance to the conjecture that approval of compromise is inversely related to issue importance. Caring about an issue predicts opposition to compromise, as does the perception that one’s preference is moral. On the other hand, if importance refers to having a personal stake in the issue, evidence is lacking, a finding consistent with the apparently minor role self-interest has been found to play in political opinions (Kinder 1998, 801, for a discussion). Whether or not an attitude is moralized seems to tell us almost as much about whether a compromise will be acceptable as knowing how extreme the attitude is.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Study 3 – Compromising Politicians}

Politicians’ ideological reputations are quite separable from their reputations as compromisers. Of course, some politicians who are widely regarded as being ideologically extreme tout uncompromising stances. Senator Ted Cruz exhibited this approach when he told Texans, “if you’re looking for an established moderate who will go to Washington and work across the aisle and compromise, and continue this spending and building the debt deeper . . . I’m not the guy” (quoted in Longview News Journal 2012). At the same time, there are many examples of ideologically committed individuals who cultivate a reputation as compromisers. Ted Kennedy was the so-called “Liberal Lion” of the Senate, but well known for a willingness to hash out bipartisan agreements, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. John McCain, for his part, is regarded as one of the more conservative Republican senators, regularly earning abysmal scores from Americans for Democratic Action (a liberal rating organization). But he too has earned a reputation as a compromiser, championing bipartisan legislation on campaign finance and immigration.

The hypothesis of Study 3 is that moralized attitudes weigh on the approach citizens like their representatives to adopt. As in Study 2, I shall be comparing the implications of moral conviction to other aspects

\textsuperscript{12}On the idea that the relationship for Moral Conviction is unfairly advantaged by being measured with more items, I repeat the analyses above using only one of the Moral Conviction items. The results do not change (Supplementary Information, §2.7). I also estimate models in which Extremity and Importance are combined into a summary measure of attitude intensity. Moral Conviction remains a highly significant predictor above and beyond this intensity measure (Supplementary Information, §2.8).

\textsuperscript{13}There is some evidence that the key result from Study 2 is persistent over time. Several weeks after Study 2, some of its participants were invited to meet a researcher in a lab to participate in a separate study on political conversations. That study included measures of attitudes toward compromise on some of the same issues presented in Study 2. Several weeks later, moral conviction (as measured in the earlier profile survey) remained a significant predictor of opposition to compromise (as measured weeks later) ($p < .02$). None of the other attitude strength measures were significant (all $p > .48$). The Supplementary Information (§2.9) contains details on this replication.
Figure 1: Politicians Who Differ on Compromise

Next we would like your opinion on two possible candidates who might compete for their party’s nomination to run for Congress. These candidates are both fairly liberal Democrats and have similar visions when it comes to Social Security, but they differ in terms of how they plan to negotiate with Republicans. Their approaches are described below. Rejects means this candidate will vote against any proposal that includes this element. Negotiable means the candidate dislikes this policy, but is willing to make concessions in this area if it leads to gains in others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Candidate A</th>
<th>Candidate B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase taxes on large inheritances</td>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>Supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase taxes on the wealthy</td>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>Supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise the retirement age</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly decrease monthly payments</td>
<td>Negotiable</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Question seen by respondents who opposed Social Security cuts in Study 3. Respondents who favored cuts saw an alternative version. The slate of issue positions was randomly swapped between Candidates A and B.

Data and measures Data were collected by GfK Research which, as noted in Study 1, uses random-digit-dial and address-based sampling methods to construct a nationally representative sample. The study was funded by the National Science Foundation via Timesharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS; SES-0818839). The study was in the field from May 30 to June 10, 2013 and has 1,345 respondents. All analyses below are weighted to be reflective of the national population.

The study focused on opinions about Social Security reform. This issue was selected because it is putatively an economic issue and thus tests the idea that attitudes can become moralized on topics not typically regarded as moral. The outset of the study measured the extremity, importance, personal relevance, and moral conviction of attitudes concerning Social Security reform.\(^{14}\)

After registering their opinion about Social Security reform, subjects were asked to evaluate two congressional candidates who agreed with their Social Security views. Figure 1 shows the question seen by

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\(^{14}\)The question wordings were similar to those used in Study 2 with one improvement. In Study 2, the stem question was, in a sense, “double barreled.” (This was intentional, to mimic media frames often attached to issue discussions and to prepare respondents to evaluate a compromise between dueling proposals to come later in that instrument.) In Study 3, the stem question focuses on just one proposal: decreasing Social Security benefits. All question wordings appear in the Supplementary Information (§3.1).
respondents who opposed Social Security cuts. Respondents who supported Social Security cuts saw an alternative version that described two “fairly conservative Republicans” and listed four different policies.\textsuperscript{15} Respondents who selected the neutral point on the stem Social Security question were randomly assigned to one of the two question versions. Additionally, for balance, the slate of positions associated with Candidate A and B was randomly assigned (such that “negotiable” was associated with Candidate A in half the cases, but always attached to the same policy). Respondents were asked how likely they would be to support each Candidate A and B in the election on a five-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “very.” I subtracted one candidate’s support from the other’s to construct a measure of preference for the compromising politician.

\textbf{Results} Table 3 shows the results of a model (OLS) in which support for the compromising politician is regressed on measures of Social Security attitude \textit{Extremity}, \textit{Importance}, \textit{Relevance}, and \textit{Moral Conviction}. Here, we see little support for the conjecture that the Importance people attach to a particular issue underlies support for compromise, as \textit{Importance} has no significant bearing on candidate preference. Similarly, perceived \textit{Relevance} exhibits a relationship that is attributable to chance. The subjective perceptions captured by this measure are likely the best way to measure personal relevance, but as an additional check, model (2) also examines objective factors that are likely to bear on Social Security preferences: \textit{Age} and \textit{Income}. As can be seen, these measures also do little to predict support for a compromising candidate. Indeed, a Wald test fails to reject the hypothesis that all three of \textit{Relevance}, \textit{Age}, and \textit{Income} are jointly equal to zero ($p < .55$).

Moralized attitudes, in contrast, seem important here—almost as important as having an extreme attitude. The relationship does not appear to vary by which side of the Social Security issue the respondent took.\textsuperscript{16} The results strongly support the notion that different attitude characteristics weigh on support for compromise in different ways, and that moralized attitudes evoke resistance to compromise.

\section*{Study 4a – Paying to Oppose Compromise}

Study 3 finds a link between moralized attitudes and opposition to a compromising politician. One reason the possibility of such a link is noteworthy is that to oppose a compromising politician can be self-defeating. Recall Indiana’s 2012 Republican senatorial primary election, a contest that put the difference between

\textsuperscript{15}The policies were: 1) decrease monthly payments to beneficiaries (both support); 2) increase the retirement age (both support); 3) raise taxes on the middle class (both reject); 4) raise taxes on businesses (one reject, one negotiable). Full question wordings are available in the Supplementary Information (§3.1)

\textsuperscript{16}Among individuals who saw the version with liberal candidates ($N=1,052$), $\hat{\beta}_{\text{Moral Conviction}} = -.108; \ SE = .047; \ p < .01$. Among individuals who saw the alternative version ($N=293$), $\hat{\beta}_{\text{Moral Conviction}} = -.073; \ SE = .060; \ p < .23$. 

17
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremity</td>
<td>-0.130***</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.049)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Conviction</td>
<td>-0.108***</td>
<td>-0.105***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.587***</td>
<td>0.594***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,306</td>
<td>1,306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<.10

Table 3: OLS models. All variables coded 0–1. The dependent variable is support for a compromising congressional candidate minus support for a candidate who opposes compromise.
compromising and uncompromising candidates into stark relief. Hoosiers faced a choice between incumbent senator Richard Lugar and challenger Richard Mourdock. Lugar’s record of bipartisanship was a primary point of emphasis for Mourdock. For instance, he called Lugar “Obama’s favorite Republican” (quoted in Pegram 2012) and, responding to Lugar’s critique that Mourdock had an “unrelenting partisan mindset,” he said, “I have a mindset that says bipartisanship ought to consist of Democrats coming to the Republican point of view” (quoted in Weinger 2012). The primary voters selected Mourdock, but the choice almost certainly resulted in an undesirable outcome from their point of view. Where the centrist Lugar was widely regarded as unbeatable in a general election—he won his 2006 race with 87% of the vote—Mourdock would lose to Democrat Joe Donnelly.

Other researchers have noted that turnout among moderate voters has declined in recent years (Abramowitz 2011; Prior 2007). This phenomenon is not sufficient to explain outcomes such as Richard Lugar’s defeat, since even extreme voters, to the extent they have foresight, should be able to anticipate the self-defeating consequences of their actions. Against the backdrop of moral psychology, however, the phenomenon makes more sense, as moralized attitudes orient behavior toward adhering to rules, rather than maximizing gains. Study 4 tests the hypothesis that moralized attitudes shift behavior out of a cost/benefit framework. It does so by presenting subjects with an opportunity to gain monetary benefits—but only if they allow an issue opponent also to gain.

**Data and measures** Data come from the TESS instrument described in Study 3. After registering their Social Security attitudes, subjects were invited to receive a monetary benefit, but with a tradeoff. Figure 2 shows the dilemma posed to individuals who oppose cuts to Social Security benefits (as well as a random half of individuals who chose the neutral point on the stem question). All other respondents saw an alternative formulation in which a donation would be made to “the Progressive Change Campaign Committee (PCCC), an organization whose supporters strongly oppose changes to Social Security benefits.” The effort is to construct a measure of subjects’ Willingness to Accept (WTA) benefits.

As can be seen in the figure, the response options in the WTA measure were chosen with attention to their symbolic meaning. Option E provides maximum benefit to the subject and is thus the alternative that would be expected under at least some formulations of a Downsian / *homo economicus* perspective. Option

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17Cox (1997) argues that voters have the capacity for such strategic foresight although, consistent with the argument here, they apply it unevenly.

18The Supplementary Information (§4.1) shows the PCCC version of the WTA measure.

19Baron and Spranca (1997) note that WTA is similar to the more commonly used Willingness to Pay (WTP), but has some advantages for studies of moralized attitudes. WTP is constrained by one’s resources, but individuals can *decline* an arbitrarily large sum of money. Moreover, because WTA frames “no moral violation” as the status-quo, it more clearly characterizes the acceptance of benefits as a kind of complicity.
Figure 2: Measuring Willingness to Accept Benefits

Next, we would like to offer you the possibility of receiving a payment of bonus points. (This payment is above and beyond the baseline amount you are receiving to complete this survey.) You can choose an amount to receive from the list below and GfK will credit your KnowledgePanel account with points worth the amount you choose. The catch is that, for whatever amount you choose, a donation will also be made to the Tea Party Patriots, an organization whose supporters strongly support cuts to Social Security benefits.

Select one answer only

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>You receive</th>
<th>Tea Party Patriots receives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>$1</td>
<td>$0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>$2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>$3</td>
<td>$3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Willingness to Accept (WTA) measure posed to individuals who oppose cuts to Social Security. Individuals who favor cuts saw an alternative formulation in which “Progressive Change Campaign Committee” is substituted for Tea Party Patriots.
Table 4: Responses to WTA Measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tea Party Version</th>
<th>PCCC Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$0.00 / $0.00</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1.00 / $0.50</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2.00 / $2.00</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3.00 / $3.50</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4.00 / $5.00</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Survey-weighted proportions choosing each response option for the WTA measure, depending on the disliked group. (Individuals opposing Social Security cuts gave benefits to the Tea Party. Individuals supporting cuts gave benefits to the PCCC. Individuals with a neutral preference regarding cuts were randomly assigned to either formulation.)

C would be chosen by individuals who are willing to accept benefits as long as they are not exceeded by the disliked group. Option B would be attractive to individuals who are willing to gain as long as their gains outpace those given to the disliked group. Option A would be attractive to individuals who would accept no benefit whatsoever, if it implies that a disliked group will gain.

**Results** Table 4 shows the distribution of responses to the WTA measure, depending on whether the disliked group was the Tea Party or the PCCC. As can be seen, the vast majority of respondents choose one of the extreme options, either maximizing their benefits, or accepting no benefits at all. Eschewing all benefits is clearly the most popular response.

Table 5 examines what predicts responses to the WTA measure. Because each response option has its own symbolic meaning, I estimate relationships by ordered probit. Similar to Study 3, I estimate models that examine subjective perceptions alone, and another set that incorporates an objective measure of how personally relevant monetary benefits are likely to be: respondents’ income. I examine relationships in the full sample, but also the subsets that saw the Tea Party version of the WTA measure, and the PCCC version.

The pattern of results follows that seen in previous studies. The relationship for **Extremity** is large among both sets of respondents. It is not significant within the subset of respondents who viewed the PCCC WTA measure, although the standard errors here are considerably larger. The relationships for **Importance** and **Relevance** are small and easily attributable to chance.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{20}\)For instance, considering the second model in the table, for **Importance**, \(p < .69\). For **Relevance**, \(p < \)
Table 5: Who Pays to Oppose Compromise?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th>Tea Party Version</th>
<th>PCCC Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremity</td>
<td>-0.525***</td>
<td>-0.439**</td>
<td>-0.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.149)</td>
<td>(0.170)</td>
<td>(0.294)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.315</td>
<td>-0.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.259)</td>
<td>(0.290)</td>
<td>(0.507)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
<td>-0.293</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.201)</td>
<td>(0.217)</td>
<td>(0.427)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Conviction</td>
<td>-0.342*</td>
<td>-0.498**</td>
<td>0.246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.193)</td>
<td>(0.226)</td>
<td>(0.362)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– (0.184)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>– (0.417)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,284</td>
<td>1,012</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<.10

Table 5: Ordered probit models. Coefficients for ordered probit cut points are not displayed (but see Supplementary Information, §4.2).

As above, there is considerable evidence that moralized attitudes are inimical to compromise. The null hypothesis is rejected with somewhat less confidence in the full sample (in these two models, \( p < .08 \) by a two-tailed test). Among respondents who viewed the Tea Party WTA measure, the relationship is estimated to be larger even than that for Extremity. Among subjects who saw the PCCC WTA measure, the relationship is estimated to be positive, but the larger standard errors here leave open a real possibility that the true relationship is in fact negative.\(^{21}\)

The possibility of mutual gain is the very essence of compromise. That some individuals forego benefits simply to deprive a disliked group from benefiting represents a meaningful obstacle to the way pluralistic government is hoped to resolve conflicts, a matter to which I return in the discussion.

Study 4b – Evoking a Moral Mindset

Study 4 also incorporated an original experiment designed to examine the characteristics of moralized attitudes. I test two competing hypotheses concerning how moral conviction should respond to a frame that

\(^{26}\) For Income, \( p < .17 \).

\(^{21}\) Applying the logic of a one-tailed hypothesis test, if the true relationship were negative, we would expect to see positive coefficients of this magnitude in 25\% of repeated samples of this size.
emphasizes moral considerations.

First, some psychological characteristics are mental linkages that can be activated among those who have them. For instance, racial cues in political advertisements appear to intensify resentment among individuals who harbor it (Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002). Similarly, external threat appears to activate intolerance among individuals with authoritarian predispositions (Stenner 2005). The Resonance Hypothesis says that moral conviction works in a similar way. It expects a moral frame to intensify the consequences of moral conviction among individuals who have it, but a null or perhaps even a backfire effect among individuals who lack it.

Other psychological characteristics follow a different pattern. For instance, anger is a species-typical mental program in humans (Sell, Tooby and Cosmides 2009). Its prominence varies across individuals—we have all met people who are, in general, angrier than others—but everyone experiences anger under certain trigger conditions. The Inducement Hypothesis says that moral conviction works in a similar way. It proposes that the moral conviction questions capture the existence (or absence) of an already-moralized mindset. It expects moral frame to have a null effect among people high in moral conviction, since it is impossible to induce what is already present. However, it expects that a moral frame will make individuals low in moral conviction behavior more like the moralizers.

The veracity of the Resonance and Inducement Hypotheses bear on the political ramifications of moralized attitudes. Does moralized thinking come only from a particular segment of the population (the Resonance Hypothesis)? If so, then a moral frame might be an effective way to evoke principled opposition from audiences with moralized attitudes, but could be risky for messages targeted at other audiences. Alternatively, can almost anyone be coaxed into a moral mindset (the Inducement Hypothesis)? If so, then we might expect politicians to intensify or inoculate the pattern, depending on their goals.

**Design and measures** What makes a frame moral? The psychological literature provides some guidance in the form of a distinction between consequentialism and deontology. A consequentialist appeal justifies a policy in terms of its expected effects. A deontological appeal, in contrast, suggests that some actions are required or prohibited by their very nature. For instance, a consequentialist way to frame one side of the collective bargaining issue would be, “Collective bargaining agreements cause states to face budgetary problems” while a deontological framing on the same side would be, “Everybody has a right to work.” The former frame is, in principle, falsifiable, such as if it were shown that collective bargaining agreements do not cause budgetary problems. The latter is not.

Reviewing an expansive literature, Joshua Greene (2007b, 37) writes that consequentialism and deontology are “psychological natural kinds. . . . they are philosophical manifestations of two dissociable
psychological patterns, two different ways of moral thinking that have been part of the human repertoire for thousands of years." This claim draws from a host of studies showing consequentialist judgments to activate higher cognition, more executive function, more complex planning, and brain areas that are diminished or absent in humans’ evolutionary ancestors. In contrast, deontological reasoning is quicker, more emotional, more primal, and more closely tied to the affective responses I have suggested are characteristically moral. Because of their association with the intuitive, emotional aspects of moral psychology, I shall refer to deontological frames as moral frames.  

With this distinction in mind, I constructed political messages that framed Social Security reform in a moral and nonmoral way. Prior to completing the WTA measure described above, subjects in the TESS sample were asked to evaluate one of these appeals. All subjects read an appeal congruent with their expressed Social Security opinion, but the appeals were either consequential or deontological in nature. Figure 3 shows the two conditions presented to subjects who oppose Social Security cuts. The Supplementary Information (§4.3) shows parallel stimuli presented to subjects who favor cuts. Prior to fielding, these stimuli underwent extensive instrumentation checking and revision to verify that they manipulated consequential and deontological considerations in the desired way while leaving other thoughts as stable as possible (see Supplementary Information, §4.4).  

There were two dependent variables for the experimental manipulation: the WTA measure, but also respondents’ conscious evaluation of the message. The question was “how would you rate the quality of the ideas raised in the news clipping? Do they seem high in quality, or do they not seem that way?” The five response options ranged from “very low in quality” to “extremely high in quality.”  

**Results** As planned, I pool responses together, treating the two stories viewed by Social Security proponents as comparable to the stories viewed by opponents. Scaling the Quality and WTA measure to run 0–1, there is no significant difference depending on which kind of argument respondents viewed. (For Quality, $\beta_{\text{moral}} = .020; \ SE = .019; \ p < .29$. For WTA, $\beta_{\text{moral}} = .036; \ SE = .031; \ p < .25$). To assess the Resonance and Inducement Hypotheses, however, requires attention to moderating factors, as there is the possibility that a positive effect among some individuals would be offset by a negative effect among others. To examine such

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22 Philosophers will recognize this labeling as a coercion of terms, since consequentialism itself represents an estimable family of moral theories (e.g. the philosophy of Bentham and Mill). I beg forgiveness. My claim is certainly not that consequentialism is nonmoral in any deep ontological sense—only that, purely as a matter of psychology, consequential frames are less likely to engage characteristically moral processing.  
23 Subjects neutral on the Social Security question were randomly assigned to read an appeal for or against cuts.  
24 I am thankful to James Druckman and an anonymous TESS reviewer for advice concerning these tests.
Figure 3: Experimental Stimuli

![Nonmoral Stimulus](image1)

![Moral Stimulus](image2)

Figure 3: Experimental stimuli presented to subjects who oppose Social Security cuts. Subjects who favor cuts saw one of two parallel stories (available in the Supplementary Information, §4.3).

To estimate moderating effects, I estimate (for both Quality and WTA, and by weighted OLS):

\[
DV = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{Extremity} + \beta_2\text{Importance} + \beta_3\text{Relevance} + \beta_4\text{Moral Conviction} + \\
\beta_5\text{Treatment} + \beta_6\text{Extremity} \times \text{Treatment} + \beta_7\text{Importance} \times \text{Treatment} + \\
\beta_8\text{Relevance} \times \text{Treatment} + \beta_9\text{Moral Conviction} \times \text{Treatment} + \epsilon.
\]

Coefficients from such an interactive model are difficult to interpret (but they are reported in the Supplementary Information, §4.5). To render them more decipherable, Figure 4 shows the marginal effect of the moral framing at high and low values of the moderators, and with other moderators held at their means. (For instance, the top row shows the marginal effect of the treatment among individuals with neutral [non-extreme] attitudes, but with Importance, Relevance, and Moral Conviction held at their means. This estimate happens to be zero.)

Before continuing it is worth a moment to note that the various configurations implied by the figure map onto interpretable substantive meanings. For instance, an individual might exhibit an attitude high in Importance, but low in Relevance if she felt passionate about Social Security—deeply cared about its preservation—but was insulated from the policy effects because of her wealth or young age. For another example, an individual might be high Relevance in but low in Extremity if she expects the outcome of
Figure 4: Marginal Effect of Moral Frame

Figure 4: Marginal effect of moral (deontological) framings, depending on attitude characteristics. For each estimate, other characteristics are held at their means. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Positive values indicate higher perceived quality and greater willingness to accept benefits.
Social Security politics to affect her, but is unsure of which policy course is preferable. As I note above, there is reason to believe moral conviction to be inculcated by social milieu.

As concerns **Quality**, the results speak in favor of the Resonance Hypothesis. Among people high in **Moral Conviction**, the moral frame is significant and positive ($p < .01$). Among people low in **Moral Conviction** it is significant and negative ($p < .04$). In the model, $\beta_9$ is significant ($\beta_9 = .230; \text{SE} = .083; p < .01$), but none of the other interaction terms are (all $p > .17$). Thus, there is evidence that the moral frame causes quality assessments to pivot around the moral conviction measure, evoking a positive response from individuals with moralized attitudes, but a backfire response from individuals with non-moralized attitudes.

The pattern for the **WTA** measure is different. As can be seen, the **Moral Conviction** interaction is not significant ($\beta_9 = -.027; \text{SE} = .139; p < .85$). Responses do appear to vary, however, by **Relevance** ($\beta_8 = .333; \text{SE} = .132; p < .02$). The significant ($p < .04$) negative marginal effect among subjects low in **Relevance** is consistent with the Inducement hypothesis, as it suggests that the moral frame evokes uncompromising behavior from individuals who are psychologically detached from the Social Security issue, making them behave more like people with moralized attitudes. The significant ($p < .02$) positive effect among individuals who say Social Security is personally relevant was not expected, and implies that the moral frame makes these individuals more amenable to compromise. One possibility that would explain the latter result is that people for whom the Social Security issue strikes close to home are especially concerned about a political impasse, and that the style of the moral frame alarms them with the possibility that such an event is possible.

The results of the experiment suggest that moral frames may work on two levels. When it comes to conscious responses, the sort captured by the **Quality** measure, moral rhetoric galvanizes people with moralized attitudes, but alienates those with nonmoral attitudes.\(^{25}\) This pattern might explain the absolutism frequently found in appeals made to audiences of “true believers”—why it often seems to emphasize intuitive first principles. At the same time, moral frames might have more insidious effects among people whose attitudes are not moralized. Even while these individuals consciously reject such messages, the moral frame seems to evoke uncompromising behavior from them.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

It has been argued that political compromise is hard because so many pressures of winning and holding office collide with the imperative to govern (Gutmann and Thompson 2012). If a politician exhibits nuance

\(^{25}\)In a similar experiment, Ryan (2012) finds that deontological appeals concerning the issue of eminent domain increase partisans’ desire to participate in politics, but demobilize independents.
on the issues, she risks failing to distinguish herself from the opposition. If she revises her views, she earns castigation as a “flip-flopper.” If she admits a reasonable basis to her opponent’s perspective, she can be accused of equivocation. If she too early signals a willingness to bargain, she weakens her negotiating position.

This article lends credence to the idea that campaign pressures work against compromise while showing that opposition comes from specific kinds of people. There is no obvious explanation for some acts of political defiance: why citizens would eschew even the abstract idea of compromise, why they would reject proposals from which they could benefit, and why some would rather, in Morris Fiorina’s phrasing, “lose with their candidate than win with a moderate” (quoted in Roberts 2013). I find evidence consistent with the idea that these strange patterns have a basis in people’s moral psychology, which has the potential to baffle cost/benefit calculus and render concession unthinkable. More than perceived importance or even personal relevance, moral conviction leads citizens to oppose—even at a cost—the possibility of compromise.

I am not the first to posit a connection between moral thinking and acceptance of political compromise (e.g., see Ellis and Kasniunas 2011, 86; Lowi 2011, xiii; Mooney and Schuldt 2008, 199; Mucciaroni 2011, 192; Smith 2002, 387), but the argument here is new nonetheless. Past work suggests that moral thinking is particular to certain issues, stemming from either the issue’s essential characteristics (e.g. Engeli, Green-Pedersen and Larsen 2012) or perhaps the frames issue advocates use (e.g. Mooney 2001). I suggest, in contrast, that it is proper to think of morality as being in the eye of the beholder, emerging from the socialized perspective that a preference is objective and universal (cf. Skitka 2010). As a corollary, I argue (and find) that its implications are more far-reaching than previously realized. Economic and noneconomic issues alike are vulnerable to moralization, along with the difficulties that accompany it.

Is there a link between moral conviction and the acrimonious state of American politics? The recent development of survey measures of moral conviction make it difficult to examine dynamics over time, but there is reason to think so. As others have argued, compared to past years, elections now see more participation from strong partisans, less from moderates (Abramowitz 2011; Prior 2007). This shift does not, in itself, explain opposition to compromise, since partisans can benefit from compromises just as much as nonpartisans. But if partisanship correlates with attitudes that are more extreme and moralized—and as Ryan (N.d.) notes, it does—then candidates’ fates increasingly depend on citizens who have a mindset hostile to bipartisanship, negotiation, and compromise. Even for politicians who have policy objectives and want to forge pragmatic bargains across the aisle, the temptation to adopt a black and white or “Manichaean” view on politics may be greater than it once was.

This research raises several new questions. Of course, there is the question of exactly what develops and sustains moral convictions, a matter that psychologists have begun to engage (e.g. Skitka 2013). Political

26 For a fuller discussion of such puzzling behavior from political extremists, see Fiorina (1999).
science is well suited to contribute to this research through survey measures that examine individual-level (e.g. personality) and contextual (e.g. media use) determinants. Because it is politically relevant to understand the conditions under which the effects of moral conviction are intensified and attenuated, political scientists should turn attention to the relationship between moral conviction and framing (cf. Clifford and Jerit 2013; Marietta 2012). It is common advice in dispute resolution to avoid emphasizing values or principles, and instead focus on transacting material interests (Provis 1996, for a discussion). Can politics benefit from incorporating this approach? Here, I have provided early evidence that moral rhetoric resonates with the morally convicted, and that it may induce uncompromising behavior from some individuals who lack moral conviction. Future studies should flesh out these patterns with attention to other issues and other manifestations of resistance to compromise.

Is compromise good? Not necessarily. Not always. The argument for compromise rests on its instrumental, not its moral, value. Compromises can be bad or good, and we need not stipulate which ones are which to see that if a political order systematically resists compromise, if its leaders insist that only one outcome can be consistent with ideals, if every disagreement amounts to an impasse, it is sure to incubate bitterness and resentment. It is part of wisdom to see that pluralistic society asks its citizens to put certain political values—tolerance, mutual respect, stability—before commitment to any more provincial view. In this, one sees new prescience in James Q. Wilson’s (1967, 45) fear for “the time when politics is seized with the issue [of morality]. Our system of government cannot handle matters of that sort (can any democratic system?) and it may be torn apart by the effort.”
References


