

# From Barack Obama to Donald Trump

## The evolution of moral appeals in national conventions

Jennifer Lin

Northwestern University

Do Democrats and Republicans appeal to different sets of moral foundations in their national convention speeches? Do they make efforts to frame their messages so that it is attractive to their base and moderate voters? This study examines the moral appeals that political elites use to communicate to their supporters. I analyze speeches starting from the 2008 to the 2020 Republican and Democrat National Conventions to see if there are differences in appeals to Harm, Fairness, Ingroup, Authority and Purity, which are tenets of the Moral Foundations Theory. I find that Republicans are more likely to appeal to Authority, and in 2020, Purity, while Democrats appeal mostly to Harm. Using qualitative content analyses, we see that both parties apply the moral language favored by the other side in their convention speeches on top of making appeals to moral foundations that are favored by their own base.

**Keywords:** moral psychology, political communication, political parties, national conventions, elections

### 1. Introduction

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

While President Carter and Congressman Crenshaw are addressing different topics, their comments are focused on the same theme – appealing to the moral values of their audience through verbal communication. These are not isolated instances. As the political discourse continues to evolve with each successive presidential election, we see many more instances of such occurrences that often get covered in the news. For example, Nancy Pelosi proclaimed in a comment before the government shutdown in January 2019 that the border wall proposal is “an immorality. It’s the least effective way to protect the border ...” (Pavlich 2019).

These examples from President Carter or Congressman Crenshaw demonstrate a burgeoning pattern in the moralization of politics (Brandt, Wisneski, and Skitka 2015). In general, people are seemingly more likely to respond to political rhetoric that reflects a moral value (Lipsitz 2018) and even more if it is congruent to their views (Feinberg and Willer 2019). As politics is increasingly seen in terms of what is right and what is wrong (Garrett and Bankert 2020), people become more likely to see their views as correct and make it be the end all of the policy outcomes (Skitka 2012). While there is evidence to suggest that the increasing trend to view politics in the path of right versus wrong does not lead to problems in compromises (Ryan 2017), other scholars see such moral politicization as a possible beginning to out-group hostility (Tappin and McKay 2019). Across the studies to date in moral psychology, the main focus is on the use of survey methods to evaluate moral attitudes. However, little has been done to consider the integration of moral values in political speeches. When a politician appeals to one’s moral values, they are connecting to their supporters by appealing to their core beliefs and shaping their vision of the future.

The goal of this study is to understand the role of moral appeals in politics. Specifically, do Democrat and Republican political speeches appeal to different moral foundations? If so, what patterns can we detect that distinguish the parties? For this study, I refer to Democrats and Republicans as liberals and conservatives quite interchangeably. Due to partisan sorting, Democrats have become more associated with liberalism and Republicans with conservatism (Levendusky 2009).<sup>1</sup> I find that, in political speeches, the parties appeal to different moral foundations as defined by the Moral Foundations Theory. The Democrats are more likely to discuss protecting people from harm and ensuring a fair system, especially for people who are most vulnerable. The Republicans are more likely to address preserving the values of this country and focus on self-determination in the American Dream. However, to fully understand the ways the party appeals to morality, one must look beyond the text analyses and see the application of these foundations in context and appreciate the social and political contributions

---

1. I recognize that not all Democrats are liberal nor are all Republicans conservative.

that these speeches make to the overall message the party seeks to convey (Wodak 2011). This statement is perhaps banal but it is how the current study departs from previous research. Using qualitative content analyses, I demonstrate that both parties apply the moral framework of the opponent in their convention speeches to boost their own platforms in an attempt to win the support of undecided or swing voters.

## 2. The Moral Foundations Theory

Moral values make social life possible (Haidt and Kesebir 2010) and they can be seen in how we care for others, preserve justice and work in groups (Haidt 2012). Yet, as a concept, morality can be hard to operationalize. One way is through the Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt 2013).

The Moral Foundations Theory is a social psychological concept that assesses why norms vary with culture while still reflecting universal human values (Hibbing, Smith, and Alford 2013). The body of this theory consists of five foundations (Haidt 2012), which are as follows:

**Harm/Care:** Emphasizes the innate sense of care and empathy that individuals have for others, especially people who are most vulnerable.

**Fairness/Reciprocity:** Focuses on equality and truthfulness, especially in a cooperative relationship.

**Ingroup/Loyalty:** Addresses concerns for building a cohesive group.

**Authority/Tradition:** Emphasizes respect for those in power and good leadership.

**Purity/Sanctity:** Addresses the motivation to avoid biological contaminants such as pathogens and parasites that have posed challenges to human life.

Research in moral foundations suggests that there is a fundamental difference between liberals and conservatives when it comes to the foundations that they internalize (Haidt 2012). Liberals focus more on the individualizing foundations of Harm/Care and Fairness/Reciprocity. Conservatives, on the other hand, focus more on the binding foundations of Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority/Tradition, and Purity/Sanctity (Graham et al. 2011). This comes as a result of analyses of responses from the Moral Foundations Questionnaire developed by (Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009). In this questionnaire, there are two batteries – one on the relevance of an issue for determining morality (Moral Relevance) and one on the judgment of whether something is moral (Moral Judgment). Liberals are more likely to score items related to Harm and Fairness as more relevant to determining whether something is moral and judge items related to these foundations to be

more moral. Conservatives, on the other hand, rate issues surrounding Ingroup, Authority and Purity to be more relevant to morality.

### 3. Appeals to morality in politics

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

However, are politicians from both parties highlighting their party's preferred moral foundations? The literature reports mixed findings. While Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) find rather substantial differences between the parties for moral language, text analysis using other political documents, such as party platforms, debate transcripts and Twitter exchanges do not seem to replicate these findings. For example, Lewis (2019) studied the moral appeals of presidential primary debates between 2015 and 2016. They demonstrate a clear pattern with Republicans using more Authority appeals and Democrat using more Fairness appeals. Beyond American politics, Bos and Minihold (2022) consider how political elites in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands appeal to morality in their official party manifestos and on their Twitter profiles. Using the Comparative Manifesto Project and tweets from members of Parliament from these countries, Bos and Minihold (2022) apply the Moral Foundations Dictionary and show that the moral language used in the party manifestos do not differ much despite differing positions on the issues. Even on Twitter, the differences in appeals to each of the foundations differ only so slightly between the parties. These results confer with the argument that Frimer (2019) makes where he states that "liberals

and conservatives may be cut from the same cloth". For Frimer's (2019) study, he expanded Graham, Haidt, and Nosek's (2009) study to include a broader array of texts, including church sermons, speeches from the floor of the US House of Representatives and Senate, party platforms, State of the Union speeches, and media reports. In each of these analyses, Frimer (2019) finds attenuated effects compared to Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009). From the literature, therefore, we see two different conclusions – one that highlights the differential use of moral appeals and one that is not so sanguine about whether the differences are as meaningful (Neiman et al. 2016). Democrats and Republicans might tailor language to reflect their respective bases' moral values, but their appeals may not always reliably be different. In this paper, I contribute to this discussion using national conventions as a case study.<sup>2</sup> Unlike previous studies, especially Frimer (2019), I go beyond a dictionary-based approach to analyze moral appeals in text. I include qualitative content analyses to better understand how the moral appeals contribute to the broader partisan goals in the national conventions (Wodak 2011).

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

In this paper, I consider national convention speeches as a gateway to helping us understand moral appeals in politics for several reasons. First, the goals of the parties have diverged from attracting moderate voters to shoring up their base in a more polarized America (Abramowitz 2010). As a result, while conventions are watched by people across the country, the goals of the speakers remain to rally their voters around core campaign issues championed by the party, and ensuring that their side wins over the other. Second, more recent analyses of political rhetoric, especially on representation in government, consider political speeches

---

2. This study does not seek to make causal claims that connect partisanship to moral appeals. Rather, I simply describe the ways in which parties use moral appeals to their advantage in elections, specifically during national conventions.

to understand how the elites cater to the demands of the voters (Burden 2007). Despite the policies that are predominant in these contexts, values, such as care for the poor (Miler 2018) and fairness in minority interests (Griffin and Newman 2008), nonetheless take the front seat to show the people that their representatives have moral values. Finally, speakers argue on why the party they represent is more compassionate and caring for the country. Given the division of the parties on ideological lines and policy preferences (Levendusky 2009), the messages that speakers in each convention deliver are relatively representative of the liberal and conservative values that are attributed to the parties simply based on the selection criteria that is often involved to be invited as a speaker to these occasions.

In this study, I hypothesize that, across each of the national conventions, we will see that Republicans and Democrats appealed to different moral foundations that align with the framework that their core supporters cherish, in accordance to the patterns demonstrated by research into liberal and conservative differences in the moral foundations literature (Haidt 2012). Despite the political motivations, Democrat convention speakers would be more likely to appeal to the individualizing foundations of Harm and Fairness while Republican convention speakers will be more likely to appeal to the binding foundations of Ingroup, Authority and Purity.

## 4. Methods

### 4.1 The data

The data for this study come from the 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020 Democrat and Republican National Conventions. Collectively, these four elections in American politics highlight some key moments the nation's political history. From the election of the first African-American president in 2008 to the nomination of the first woman for President in 2016 and then to the election of the first Black woman for Vice President in 2020, the Democrats experienced many history-making conventions during this period. Similarly, with the nomination of John McCain, as a national war hero, in 2008 to the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the Republicans also saw a shift in their party which went from the desires of the party's rank and file to the demands of the Make American Great Again movement. The data used in this study reflect the docket of speakers who were chosen by the party to represent their platform and interests. The majority of the speakers included in this set are primetime speakers whose words were embargoed for delivery by major news sites. To my knowledge, the speeches available and included in this study are the most complete based on transcripts collected and archived by major

news outlets like Politico, New York Times, NPR, and Rev Transcription services, among other sites, that are available for public use.<sup>3</sup> Even though not all speakers are included, the leaders and nominees of the party are. Since these pieces are often the highlight of their respective nights and of the convention, which results in high viewer traffic, their speeches are, collectively, representative of the party platform.

To keep the conventions for each year to be as comparable in quality for both parties, items that were collected for one party that were not for the other were excluded. For example, in the 2016 conventions, I was able to acquire invocations and benedictions for the Democrat convention but not the Republicans, which led me to exclude these speeches from the Democrat corpus for 2016. While one could argue that the invocation and benediction speakers are still convention speakers, the nature of these addresses invoke God and religion, such that it would add more Purity appeals to the Democrats without the Republicans getting this same addition. This might inflate the resulting count on appeals to Purity for the Democrats. Any appeals to Purity from the Republicans would be squarely from speeches rather than convention prayers. In what follows, I describe the corpus of data for each of the conventions.

#### 4.1.1 *Democrat National Convention (DNC)*

The 2008 Democrat National Convention was held in Denver, Colorado between August 25 to 27 at the Pepsi Center. This convention was historical, with the nomination of the first African-American for president. The corpus contains 28,827 words spanning 17 speeches, including those from Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Michelle Obama.

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

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

The 2020 Democrat National Convention focused on nominating Joe Biden with the prospect of a diverse ticket that can combat the ills of racism and a

---

3. Best efforts were made to contact the respective national committees for convention programming transcripts via Freedom of Information Act requests but this request was unsuccessful.

global pandemic. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the convention that was scheduled to take place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin was instead held online via primetime livestream from 9:00 PM to 11:00 PM Eastern Time from August 17 to August 20. While they had a variety of caucus meetings during the day to establish their party platform, I will focus my analyses strictly on the two-hour primetime events each night to match the Republican convention model. This was also done because, due to expectations of high viewership, the notable speakers were all included in this block of time so that they can be the face of the convention and the party. This multimedia platform provided opportunities for a host of speakers and videos, which collectively created a corpus of 82,366 words spanning 1693 lines on a continuous transcript. Compared to previous years, this convention departs from the speaker model since the online nature allowed for more dialogue among speakers. Consequently, Rev Transcription Services classifies each new speaker in dialogues as their own line. For consistency and comparison with the Republican National Convention, this format will be maintained.

#### 4.1.2 *Republican National Convention (RNC)*

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

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

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

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



## 4.2 Analysis plan

In 2009, Graham, Haidt and Nosek developed the Moral Foundations Dictionary for use with the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program (Pennebaker, Booth, and Francis 2007), which is refined by Frimer et al. (2019) to increase the ability to capture a wider array of moral appeals as they appear in text. The goal is to count the number of appearances of words associated with each of the moral foundations (as provided by a dictionary) and generate a composite score that reflects the occurrence of each foundation over the total number of words in each text. For analysis, this score is converted to a percentage. While counting words alone has pitfalls when it comes to shorter texts, this method has been proven to be a sufficient way to capture bigger picture in larger works (Garten et al. 2016).<sup>4</sup>

I analyze the speeches available from each of the national conventions to understand their moral appeals using the Moral Foundations Dictionary. Each speech will be compiled and analyzed using the `quanteda` package (Benoit and Nulty 2017). This package is constructed as the open-source version of LIWC and operates similarly to the intended software. To analyze the text, I use the `quanteda.dictionaries` package. This program is preloaded with the most updated version of the Moral Foundations Dictionary. I use the analysis model described by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009). By comparing the text to the dictionary, the program generates a score that represents the number of occurrences of words that fall under each foundation over the total number of words in each text. For each foundation, this score can also be subdivided to positive and negative connotations. Each score is computed as a percentage for analysis. I use a differences in means tests (also known as t-tests) to compare speakers across parties to determine whether one party is more inclined to use each foundation over another.<sup>5</sup> In each of the tests comparing the conventions, a Bonferoni adjustment for the p-value was applied to adjust for multiple comparisons. This is done to avoid reporting significant findings when none exists in cases where multiple statistical tests are conducted (Bretz, Hothorn, and Westfall 2016).

---

4. Recent studies have used this method, including (Enke 2020) with US Congressional speeches since World War II.

5. To test for the effect of the relative differences in the raw number of words and texts, a random sample of Democrat National Convention speeches was drawn to match the number of speeches from the Republican National Convention. The same analyses for the entire sample were repeated for this sub-sample. From these analyses, the trends presented in the results were not affected by the difference in the raw number of speeches gathered for each convention within each election year. The results for this sub-sample are provided in Supplemental Appendix A.

To validate the computer output, I, along with two research assistants, read 10% of speeches in each convention for each year to understand the broader context where moral appeals are used. These speeches are selected based on the previous analyses. We included speeches that appealed to each foundation the most. In this analysis, we coded the speeches based on how they reflected each moral foundation holistically. In this process, we largely ignore what the quantitative analysis showed regarding appeals. We determine whether we can understand the speaker's desires through reading the speeches and identify how these messages map onto the moral foundations framework. We define appeals to the foundation based on Haidt's (2012) definitions, and they are adopted as follows:<sup>6</sup>

**Harm/Care:** Expressions of care and concern towards a particular group in society

**Fairness/Reciprocity:** Definition of justice as equal opportunity for diverse groups or as equality under the law

**Ingroup/Loyalty:** Expressions of a vision for America as one focused on diversity or one focused on traditional values

**Authority/Tradition:** Expression of a need to promote founding traditions or respect for the people who serve the country

**Purity/Sanctity:** Focus on religion and prayers to God in this country

In addition, we also coded for the general approach of the speech as one that focuses on collective support, care and empathy or individual reliance and discipline. Each of us coded independently and reconciled our differences. To analyze these data, I conducted  $\chi^2$  analyses to compare the use of these foundations between Democrat and Republican speakers. In doing so, I find different patterns for Democrat and Republican speakers in their conceptualization of each foundation and this coding framework allows us to add depth to the results from the LIWC analyses by providing examples from the transcripts.<sup>7</sup>

---

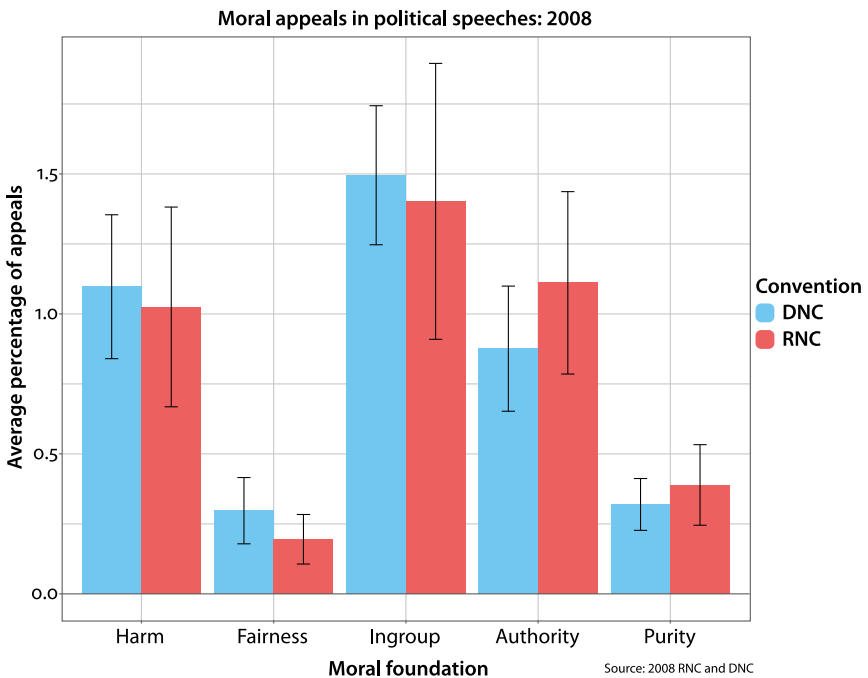
6. The coding scheme can be found in Supplemental Appendix B.

7. I also conduct structural topic models to gain a better understanding of the topics that are emerging in each of these conventions (See Supplemental Appendix C). Overall, the kind of topics that are included in the speeches largely reflect reasons to support the party. Given these results, the differences in content that are present in the speeches are better captured from the Moral Foundations Dictionary and our content analyses.

## 5. Results

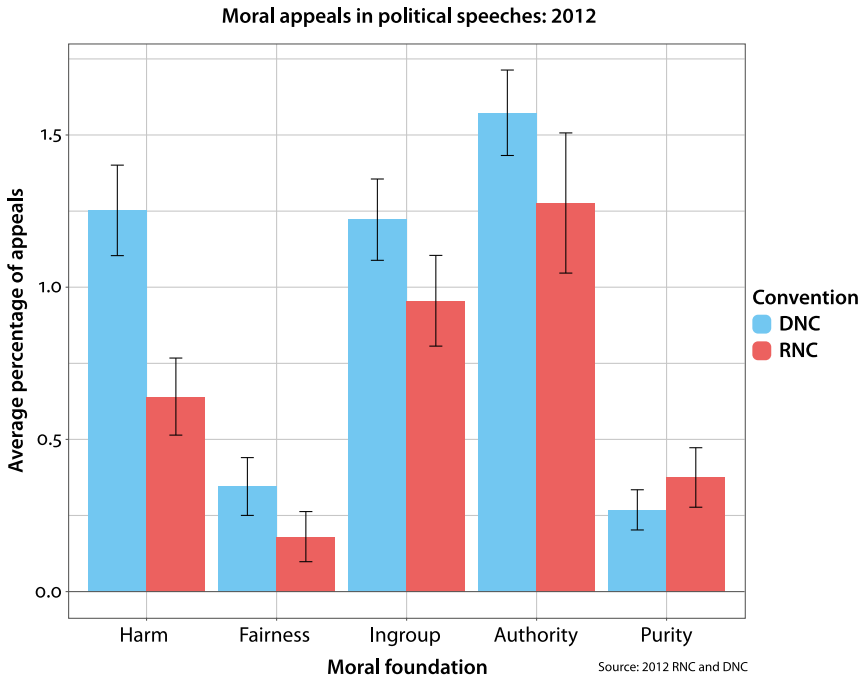
### 5.1 Application of the moral foundations dictionary

Starting with 2008, the results do not demonstrate a difference in moral appeals for Democrat or Republican speakers. Across the board, the results in Figure 1 show that Democrats and Republicans appeal to Harm ( $t=0.362$ ,  $p=1.0$ ,  $d=.144$ ), Fairness ( $t=1.495$ ,  $p=.737$ ,  $d=.513$ ), Ingroup ( $t=0.377$ ,  $p=1.0$ ,  $d=.165$ ), Authority ( $t=-1.317$ ,  $p=1.0$ ,  $d=-.531$ ) and Purity ( $t=-0.902$ ,  $p=1.0$ ,  $d=-.370$ ) at similar rates. This finding is largely consistent with the trends discussed by Bos and Minihold (2022) and Neiman et al. (2016). Considering the raw percentages, however, on average, Republicans had a slightly higher percentage of appeals to Authority and Purity and Democrats had a slightly higher percentage of appeals to Harm, Fairness and Ingroup. Together, this suggests that while there is a tendency to follow the foundations that the base prefers, the parties are, nonetheless, quite similar in their overall moral language.



**Figure 1.** Cell Means and 95% Confidence Intervals for moral appeals by foundation and convention in the 2008 Election

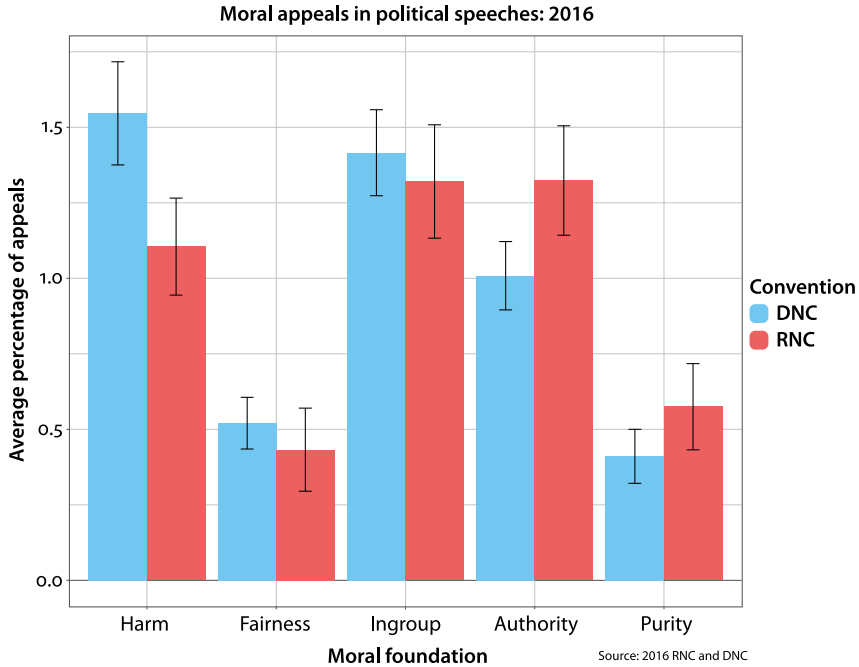
In 2012, we see some differentiation between Democrats and Republicans for the Harm and Fairness foundations. From the results shown in Figure 2, Democrats made more appeals to each of the moral foundations when compared to Republicans except Purity. Out of all the words that were spoken in this convention, Democrats used more appeals to Harm ( $t=6.284, p<.001, d=.864$ ), Fairness ( $t=2.629, p=.049, d=.364$ ), and Ingroup ( $t=2.679, p=.044, d=.410$ ). The parties do not differ in their appeals to Authority ( $t=2.221, p=.151, d=.412$ ) or Purity ( $t=1.819, p=.367, d=-.319$ ).



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

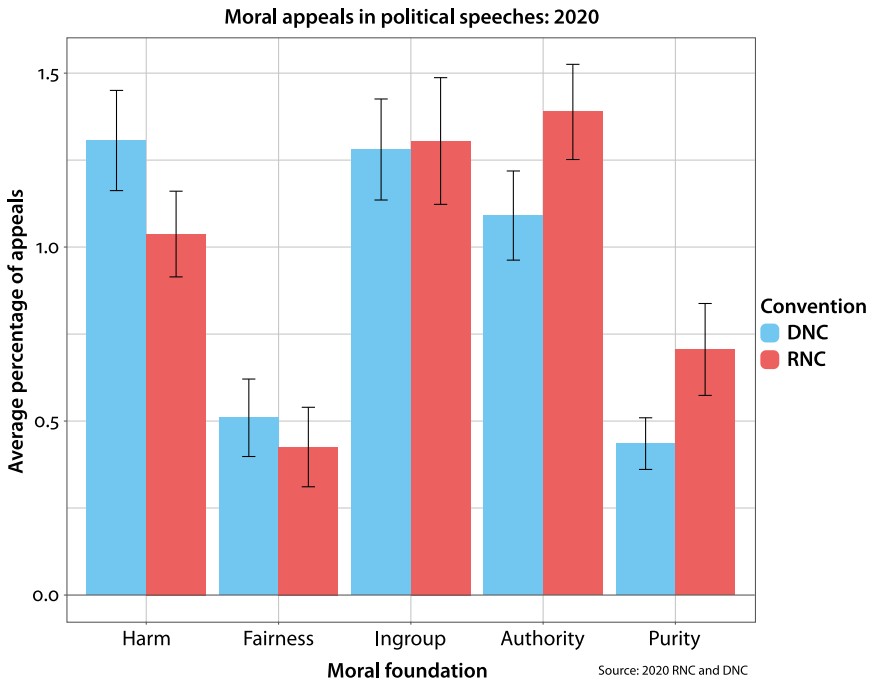
For 2016, the results in Figure 3 suggest that the Republicans emphasized the Authority foundation ( $t=-2.937, p=.02, d=-.445$ ), while Democrats stressed the Harm foundation ( $t=3.739, p=.001, d=.467$ ) in their speeches. The parties do not differ significantly in their appeals to Fairness ( $t=1.08, p=1.0, d=.165$ ), Ingroup ( $t=0.804, p=1.0, d=.114$ ) or Purity ( $t=-1.944, p=.27, d=-.297$ ). In this election cycle, with a candidate like Donald Trump, Republicans made a more noticeable shift towards rhetoric that focused on respecting traditions and the American rule of law. Meanwhile, the Republicans’ “Build the Wall” rhetoric led Democrats to embrace language that promotes protections for immigrants and other vulnerable

groups, which, perhaps, led to the observed increase in their use of appeals to the Harm foundation.



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

Turing to 2020, Figure 4 shows that Democrats had more appeals to the Harm foundation ( $t=2.784$ ,  $p=.03$ ,  $d=.100$ ) and Republicans have more appeals to the Authority foundation ( $t=-3.117$ ,  $p=.009$ ,  $d=-.118$ ). Unlike the 2016 convention, where there was little difference between the conventions on the Purity foundation, the Republicans made more appeals to Purity in 2020 ( $t=-3.508$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $d=-.148$ ). Putting this in the context of the election, the findings demonstrate a greater distinction between the parties for each of these moral appeals. Republicans under Donald Trump wanted to continue to restore American founding values and religion, which explains the increase in appeals to the Authority and Purity foundations. Democrats, on the other hand, after a summer of BLM protests and in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, wanted to show the voters that they had their interests at heart, especially those who were most vulnerable.



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

## 5.2 Content analysis of national convention speeches

The results from the text analyses communicate a clear image that both parties appeal to all of the foundations but Democrats generally tend to emphasize Harm/Care and Republicans tend to focus on Authority/Tradition. However, the words spoken at the conventions have a greater social, political and historical implication beyond the teleprompter (Wodak 2011). In this section, I consider this broader context. In doing so, I hope to better understand how the speakers appeal to each of the moral foundations to promote the party values. Overall, I find that speakers utilize appeals from each foundation, but they interpret the values differently depending on the circumstances and audience. Democrats will appeal to Authority to ensure veterans are taken care of, and Republicans will appeal to Harm to signal the need to care for American values. Such technique makes their messaging more palatable, especially to those who may be more ideologically moderate (Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017; Krzyżanowski and Krzyżanowska 2022). Even though the parties have largely sorted (Abramowitz 2010), there remain many voters who are undecided and open to persuasion (Fiorina 2017).

The parties use each of the moral values to appeal to these voters and I highlight examples of how each party interprets each foundation below.

The Harm/Care foundation focuses on the need to care for something or someone. The Democrats mostly interpret this as the need to care for someone who is vulnerable or from socially oppressed groups. On the other hand, Republicans apply Harm through the lens of self-discipline, “tough love” perspective (Lakoff 2010) and preserving the founding values of the country. While Democrat and Republican speakers did not differ in whether they appealed to minority groups (including racial minorities and low-income Americans) ( $\chi^2(1)=0.526$ ,  $p=0.468$ ), the parties placed different emphases on the kinds of groups they appealed to. Democrats were more likely to express concern for racial minorities, women and children while Republicans were more likely to express concerns for Americans who lived the American Dream. These were more likely to include families from military backgrounds or police officers. This is exemplified by excerpts from the 2012 National Conventions. Elizabeth Bruce, speaking at the DNC, highlighted the care that she got from Planned Parenthood and expressed how every woman deserves equal access to quality and empathetic health care.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, she states:

- (1) *When Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan make threats about “getting rid” of Planned Parenthood funding, it’s clear that they haven’t given a thought to women like me, women with limited resources who are sick and scared. They haven’t thought about planned and wanted babies like Ruby who are able to be here only because their mothers received the health care they needed.* – Elizabeth Bruce

For Republicans, appeals to Harm surround the need to care for the American traditions. This is demonstrated in Rick Santorum’s 2012 RNC speech where he states:

- (2) *My grandfather, like millions of other immigrants, didn’t come here for some government guarantee of income equality or government benefits to take care of his family. In 1923 there were no government benefits for immigrants except one: Freedom!* – Rick Santorum

The Fairness/Reciprocity foundation centers around the need for equality and justice. For the Democrats, the appeals convey the need to preserve equal opportunity for people, regardless of gender, race, ability, creed, or sexual orientation ( $\chi^2(1)=25.664$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In the 2016 Democrat National Conventions, Dynah

---

8. Additional examples of excerpts that covers each of the foundations are in Supplemental Appendix D.

Haubert expressed their gratitude to the opportunities afforded to them by the Americans with Disabilities. Specifically, they state:

- (3) *As a disabled person, I became a lawyer to advocate that disability is not a problem to be cured, but part of our identity and diversity. And that's why, today – on the 26th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act... – Dynah Haubert*

On the other hand, the Republicans' conceptualization of Fairness largely surrounds the need to preserve the foundational ideas of justice under the law, as established in the Constitution. This is demonstrated in Pam Bondi's 2016 RNC speech, where she states:

- (4) *Hillary will stack the Supreme Court with liberal justices who will allow government to continue its rampage against our individual rights, with utter contempt for our Second Amendment. I know Donald. He will appoint conservative justices who will defend, rather than rewrite, our Constitution. – Pam Bondi*

The Ingroup/Loyalty foundation stresses the need to maintain loyalty to your social group, kin or country. For the Democrats, this loyalty to your country is about building America as a diverse country, and encompassing people from all backgrounds ( $\chi^2(1) = 3.84, p = 0.05$ ). This is demonstrated in the 2016 Democrat National Convention speech by Khizr Khan, where he states:

- (5) *Go look at the graves of brave patriots who died defending the United States of America. You will see all faiths, genders and ethnicities. You have sacrificed nothing and no one. We cannot solve our problems by building walls, sowing division. We are stronger together. – Khizr Khan*

For Republicans, this foundation is conceptualized through the need to preserve the values of the country, where loyalty means keeping true to these values and defending them from external forces that seek to destroy them ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.95, p = 0.026$ ). Dan Sullivan highlights this in his 2016 Republican National Convention Speech:

- (6) *We will put coal miners and oil drillers back to work, not target them for extinction as Hillary promised. We MUST reignite economic opportunity and the American dream for everybody. – Dan Sullivan*

The Authority/Tradition principle emphasizes the need to respect leaders, authority figures and the traditions established by the rule of law. For Democrats, this means respecting the service of veterans and the need to strengthen Veterans' Affairs. This is exemplified by Jason Crow in his 2012 Democrat National Convention speech. Here, he speaks about his loyalty to the President and the country during his time as a veteran and emphasized the need to boost Veterans' Affairs to preserve this relationship for American service members.



- (7) *I now live with my wife and son in Colorado, but many of the men and women with whom I served never returned home. And others came home bearing visible and invisible scars of battle. When they and their families needed help, our commander-in-chief was there for them, from expanding veterans' benefits to strengthening the VA health system.* – Jason Crow

While these values were also equally shared by Republicans, the Republican speakers also emphasized a need to respect and maintain traditional conservative values that were defined in the founding of the country. Newt Gingrich made this clear in his 2012 Republican National Convention Speech where he states:

- (8) *Over three decades have passed since Ronald Reagan was first elected to the White House, yet the impact of his leadership is still evident today. While in office, President Reagan had three major goals: To restore the economy; to revive the American spirit; and to defeat totalitarianism, spreading democracy throughout the world. By remaining true to his convictions, through his belief in the American people and with tremendous optimism, President Reagan achieved these goals.* – Newt and Callista Gingrich

Finally, the Purity/Sanctity foundation emphasizes the need to preserve a pure environment, which is defined both through religion and the need to rid the physical surrounding of biological contaminants. For the speakers who appeal to Purity in their speeches in both conventions, this appeal rests strongly on religion, especially to God ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.156, p = 0.6926$ ). Both parties appeal to religion in America, beyond simply saying “God Bless America” but the context in which they do so differs. For the Democrats, this is an appeal to God for the need of strength to achieve the unity through diversity that the country desperately needs. This is exemplified by Sherman Jackson in the 2016 Democrat National Convention.

- (9) *Our times call for the very best from our political leaders. Guide them, O God, to their very highest selves. Teach them that of all the things that nations produce, none is more beloved to You than justice tempered with compassion. As a Muslim sage once put it: “God will aid a just nation, even if it is unbelieving; and God will not aid an unjust nation even if it is believing.”* – Sherman Jackson

For the Democrats in the 2020 convention, appeals to Purity address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as it is a biological contaminant that threatens the well-being of the country. In their appeals, they address efforts to combat the virus and the need for Joe Biden as president so that he could be the leading force in this effort. This sentiment is exemplified by Andrew Cuomo’s 2020 DNC speech, where he states:

- (10) *We know that our problems go beyond the COVID virus. COVID is the symptom, not the illness. Our nation is in crisis. And in many ways, COVID is just a metaphor. A virus attacks when the body is weak and when it cannot defend itself. Over these past few years, America's body politic has been weakened. The divisions have been growing deeper.*  
– Andrew Cuomo

For Republicans, this foundation comes in the context of preserving traditional religious values, especially those of the United States' Judeo-Christian origins, from threats to demolish it. This is exemplified in Tony Perkins' 2016 Republican National Convention speech where he states:

- (11) *Our freedom to appeal to and unite under God has been under steady assault. This is why we must stop those in our government and on our courts who have either in principle or in practice attempted to remove these two words, "under God" and all that they mean from public life.*  
– Tony Perkin

## 6. Discussion

Using quantitative text analyses, I show that the parties appeal to moral foundations but they do so in different ways. Democrats, in each convention, made more appeals to Harm/Care except for the 2008 convention and Republicans made more appeals to Authority/Tradition except 2012. In 2020, Republicans also had significantly more appeals to Purity/Sanctity compared to the Democrats than in previous conventions. These findings suggest that there is, and has been, a partisan divide in the types of moral appeals made in national convention speeches and suggests that political elites appeal to different moral values in order to shore up their support from the general public.

However, these significance tests are only one aspect of the picture. The qualitative coding highlights the distinctions in the interpretations and applications of these foundations in the speeches more holistically. The excerpts suggest that, even though there are not clear differences between Democrats and Republicans on Fairness, Ingroup or Purity from the LIWC analyses, the content of the conventions highlight the parties' differing interpretations of the foundations. For Republicans, even appeals to Harm and Fairness emphasize the need to preserve and protect the country and its values. This is the core of the binding foundations, which emphasize the need to serve one's group, country or family and the need to preserve these traditional values. For Democrats, even appeals to Ingroup, Authority and Purity focus on the person, and the need to respect these differences that makes someone unique. Given that the nature of the conventions are to strengthen the base and to make arguments to attract undecided voters, it is in the

party's interest to fill the docket with speakers who were also capable of "speaking the language" of the opposing side such that the program can appeal to a broad range of moral values in support of their platform (Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017; Krzyżanowski and Krzyżanowska 2022). By adopting and appealing to the moral values that are often cherished by the opposing party, these messages can be more attractive to the diverse array of voters that form each party's base and be more palatable to voters in the middle.

The major assumption in this paper is that Democrats and Republicans, within the parties, all rally around the same goals and that their convention speeches reflect the desires of the median of their respective parties. In the more recent conventions, this does not seem to be the case. Political parties are not meant to be monolithic ideological clusters (Noel 2014) and the campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump seem to suggest this. On numerous occasions, both candidates seem to be disliked by the rank and file of their parties. Due to partisan sorting (Levendusky 2009), I can take the conventions as a reflection of the overall party's ideology. However, there are heterogeneous environments within each party as well, such that there are some Republicans that are more liberal than others (Weber and Federico 2013). Future research can analyze these within parties to understand if partisans are as morally sorted as they are politically, and whether moral appeals in text are different within a party as they are between parties. To do this, it can be useful to consider primary debates especially for competitive fields with diverse candidates as that increases the chances of having all ends of a party's ideology represented.

Future research can connect the moral appeals of political speeches to evaluations of political leaders, parties and ordinary voters. Since moral conviction lends to an attitude where the beholder believes that they are right and that their positions are the morally preferred outcomes, they may be most likely to like politicians who speak to these moral values and evaluate issues appealed in this fashion to be more favorable (Skitka et al. 2021). As a result, do speeches, tweets or advertisements that make moral appeals draw greater support for the issue, candidate or idea that it is promoting? Do people who listen to these speeches like the person or the group who is making these arguments more if they use moral appeals?








This paper demonstrates the clear distinction between Democrats and Republicans in their moral appeals on the national convention stage. The analyses highlight the differences in appeals that the parties employ to mobilize their voters to the polls in early November. Yet, to fully appreciate the ways the party appeals to morality, one must look beyond the text analyses and see the application of these foundations in context. As both parties "speak the moral language" of the other party, they apply this framework to boost their own platforms. There is clearly a difference in the moral appeals that partisans choose to use, and these

patterns seems to consistently define the parties since the election of Barack Obama to Donald Trump and will perhaps continue to define the parties in the coming years.




## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Jack L. Reilly, Catherine A. Cottrell, Amanda Fidalgo, Steven M. Graham, James N. Druckman, John G. Bullock, Eli J. Finkel, Kristin Lunz Trujillo, and the participants of the American Political Behavior Graduate Workshop at Northwestern University for their helpful advice and support in this paper. Furthermore, thanks to the panelists at the 2020 MAPOR and 2021 MPSA annual meetings for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this paper. Also, thanks to Kirsten Huh, Uday Tandon and Anna Wang for excellent research assistance.

## References

- Abramowitz, Alan I. 2010. *The Disappearing Center*. Yale University Press.
- Benoit, Kenneth, and Paul Nulty. 2017. "Quanteda." *R Package Version 0.99 22* (5): 12.
-  Bos, Linda, and Sophie Minihold. 2022. "The Ideological Predictors of Moral Appeals by European Political Elites." *Political Psychology* 43 (1): 45–63.
- Brandt, Mark J., Daniel C. Wisneski, and Linda J. Skitka. 2015. "Moralization and the 2012 Us Presidential Election Campaign."
-  Bretz, Frank, Torsten Hothorn, and Peter Westfall. 2016. *Multiple Comparisons Using R*. CRC Press.
-  Burden, Barry C. 2007. *Personal Roots of Representation*. Princeton University Press.
-  Clifford, Scott, and Jennifer Jerit. 2013. "How Words Do the Work of Politics." *The Journal of Politics* 75 (3): 659–71.
-  Enke, Benjamin. 2020. "Moral Values and Voting." *Journal of Political Economy* 128 (10): 3679–3729.
-  Feinberg, Matthew, and Robb Willer. 2019. "Moral Reframing." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 13 (12): e12501.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 2017. *Unstable Majorities*. Hoover press.
- Frimer, Jeremy A. 2019. "Do Liberals and Conservatives Use Different Moral Languages?" *Journal of Research in Personality*, 103906.
-  Garrett, Kristin N., and Alexa Bankert. 2020. "The Moral Roots of Partisan Division." *British Journal of Political Science* 50 (2): 621–40.
- Garten, Justin, Reihane Boghrati, Joe Hoover, Kate M. Johnson, and Morteza Dehghani. "Morality between the lines: Detecting moral sentiment in text." In *Proceedings of IJCAI 2016 workshop on Computational Modeling of Attitudes*. 2016.
- Gass, Nick. 2016. "Jimmy Carter Blasts Trump for Lack of 'Moral and Ethical Principles'" *Politico*. <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/dnc-2016-jimmy-carter-226249>

- doi Graham, Jesse, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian A. Nosek. 2009. "Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96 (5): 1029.
- doi Graham, Jesse, Brian A. Nosek, Jonathan Haidt, Ravi Iyer, Spassena Koleva, and Peter H. Ditto. 2011. "Mapping the Moral Domain." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101 (2): 366.
- doi Griffin, John D., and Brian Newman. 2008. *Minority Report*. University of Chicago Press.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2012. *The Righteous Mind*. Vintage.
- doi Haidt, Jonathan. 2013. "Moral Psychology for the Twenty-First Century." *Journal of Moral Education* 42 (3): 281–97.
- doi Haidt, Jonathan, and Selin Kesebir. 2010. "Morality." *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 797–832.
- doi Hibbing, John R., Kevin B. Smith, and John R. Alford. 2013. *Predisposed*. Routledge.
- Jeremy Frimer, Reihane Boghrati, Jonathan Haidt Jesse Graham, and Morteza Dehgani. 2019. "Moral Foundations Dictionary for Linguistic Analyses 2.0." *Unpublished Manuscript*.
- doi Jung, Jae-Hee. 2020. "The Mobilizing Effect of Parties' Moral Rhetoric." *American Journal of Political Science* 64 (2): 341–55.
- Klar, Rebecca. 2019. "Plan to #Cancelstudentdebt 'Is Immoral'." *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/450183-republican-lawmaker-plan-to-cancelstudentdebt-is-immoral>
- doi Krzyżanowski, Michał, and Natalia Krzyżanowska. 2022. "Narrating the 'New Normal' or Pre-Legitimising Media Control?" *Discourse & Society* 33 (6): 805–18.
- doi Krzyżanowski, Michał, and Per Ledin. 2017. "Uncivility on the Web." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16 (4): 566–81.
- Lakoff, George. 2010. *Moral Politics*. University of Chicago Press.
- doi Levendusky, Matthew. 2009. *The Partisan Sort*. University of Chicago Press.
- doi Lewis, Paul G. 2019. "Moral Foundations in the 2015–16 Us Presidential Primary Debates." *Social Sciences* 8 (8): 233.
- doi Lipsitz, Keena. 2018. "Playing with Emotions." *Political Behavior* 40 (1): 57–78.
- doi Miler, Kristina C. 2018. *Poor Representation*. Cambridge University Press.
- doi Neiman, Jayme L., Frank J. Gonzalez, Kevin Wilkinson, Kevin B. Smith, and John R. Hibbing. 2016. "Speaking Different Languages or Reading from the Same Script?" *Political Communication* 33 (2): 212–40.
- doi Noel, Hans. 2014. *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pavlich, Katie. 2019. "Nancy Pelosi's Immoral Border Stance." *The Hill*. <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/424440-pavlich-nancy-pelosis-immoral-border-stance>
- Pennebaker, James W., Roger J. Booth, and Martha E. Francis. 2007. "Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count"
- doi Ryan, Timothy J. 2017. "No Compromise." *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (2): 409–23.
- doi Skitka, Linda J. 2012. Moral convictions and moral courage: Common denominators of good and evil. In M. Mikulincer & P. Shaver (Eds.), *Social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* (pp. 349–365). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- doi Skitka, Linda J., Brittany E. Hanson, G. Scott Morgan, and Daniel C. Wisneski. 2021. "The Psychology of Moral Conviction." *Annual Review of Psychology* 72 (1): 347–66.

-  Tappin, Ben M., and Ryan T. McKay. 2019. "Moral Polarization and Out-Party Hostility in the Us Political Context." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 7 (1): 213–45.
-  Weber, Christopher R., and Christopher M. Federico. 2013. "Moral Foundations and Heterogeneity in Ideological Preferences." *Political Psychology* 34 (1): 107–26.
-  Wodak, Ruth. 2011. "Complex Texts." *Discourse Studies* 13 (5): 623–33.

## Appendix A. Balanced sample replication

Since I was able to acquire more speeches from the Democrat side of the national conventions, I drew a random sample of Democrat speeches to match in corpus size of the Republican speeches and replicated the analyses from the main paper. The results are shown below.

**Table 1.** Morality in 2008 convention speeches

Foundation	Percentage		<i>t</i>	Effect Size ( <i>d</i> )
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.26	1.02	1.225	0.548
Fairness	0.29	0.2	1.562	0.698
Ingroup	1.56	1.4	0.61	0.273
Authority	0.82	1.11	-1.54	-0.689
Purity	0.3	0.39	-1.16	-0.519

*Note.* The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.

(\*)  $p = .1$  \*  $p = .05$  \*\*  $p = .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

**Table 2.** Morality in 2012 convention speeches

Foundation	Percentage		<i>t</i>	Effect Size ( <i>d</i> )
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.4	0.64	4.735 <sup>***</sup>	1.165
Fairness	0.26	0.18	1.096	0.27
Ingroup	1.22	0.96	1.721	0.424
Authority	1.63	1.28	1.906	0.469
Purity	0.32	0.37	-0.656	-0.161

*Note.* The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.

(\*)  $p = .1$  \*  $p = .05$  \*\*  $p = .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

**Table 3.** Morality in 2016 convention speeches

Foundation	Percentage		<i>t</i>	Effect Size ( <i>d</i> )
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.44	1.1	2.410 <sup>(*)</sup>	0.429
Fairness	0.48	0.43	0.529	0.094
Ingroup	1.27	1.32	-0.413	0.074
Authority	1.03	1.32	-2.157 <sup>(*)</sup>	-0.448
Purity	0.31	0.57	-3.030 <sup>*</sup>	-0.54

*Note.* The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.

(\*)  $p = .1$  \*  $p = .05$  \*\*  $p = .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

**Table 4.** Morality in 2020 convention speeches

Foundation	Percentage		<i>t</i>	Effect Size ( <i>d</i> )
	Democrat	Republican		
Harm	1.26	1.04	2.066	0.09
Fairness	0.41	0.43	-0.138	-0.006
Ingroup	1.31	1.3	0.005	0
Authority	1.03	1.39	-3.560 <sup>**</sup>	-0.155
Purity	0.41	0.71	-3.644 <sup>**</sup>	-0.158

*Note.* The percentage of words is calculated as a function of the instances words in each foundation, established by the Moral Foundations Dictionary, appeared in text divided by the total number of words in the speech.

(\*)  $p = .1$  \*  $p = .05$  \*\*  $p = .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

## Appendix B. Open ended coding questions

1. Speaker First Name (Open Ended)
2. Speaker Last Name (Open Ended)
3. Year: 2008, 2012, 2016 or 2020
4. Convention: DNC or RNC
5. Gender of Speaker: Male, Female, or Other
6. What is the general perspective of the speech
  - Collective – empathy from others and helping those who need help
  - Individualistic – self-discipline to achieve self-reliance

7. Does the speaker express concern for a certain group?
  - Yes
  - No
8. Does the speaker emphasize a description of justice?
  - Equal opportunity for all groups
  - Equality under the law
9. Does the speaker express a desire to promote diversity in this country?
  - Yes
  - No
10. Does the speaker express a desire to promote founding traditions in this country?
  - Yes
  - No
11. Does the speaker express the need to respect military service members in this country?
  - Yes
  - No
12. Does the speaker mention religion and the need for God beyond “God Bless America”?
  - Yes
  - No

### Appendix C. Structural topic models

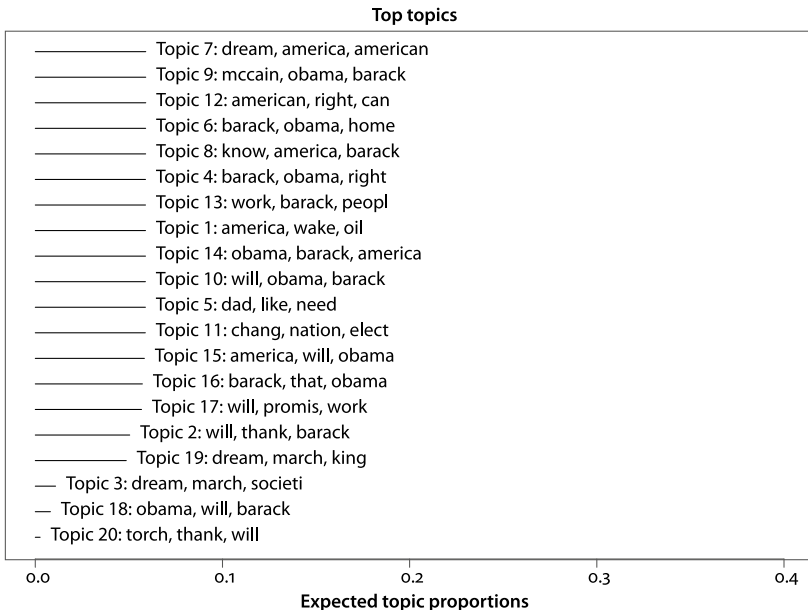


Figure 5. Structural topic model for 2008 Democrat National Convention



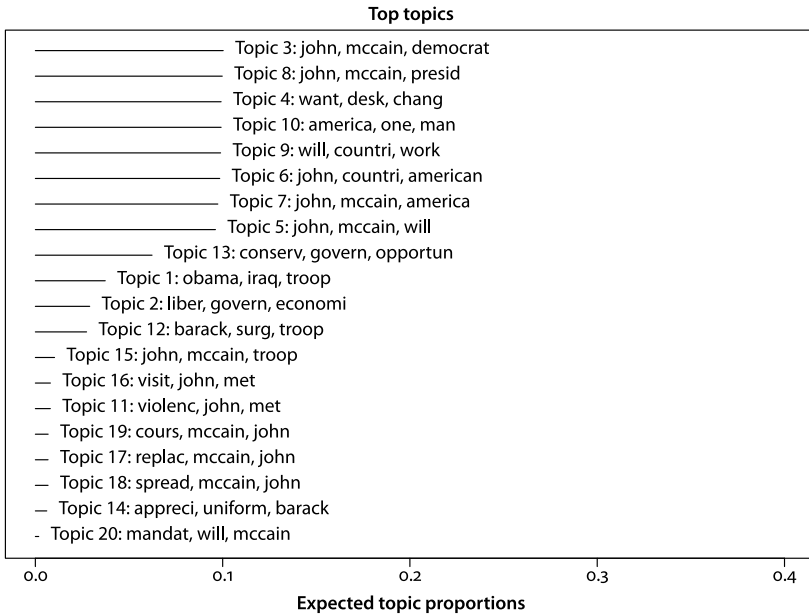


Figure 6. Structural topic model for 2008 Republican National Convention

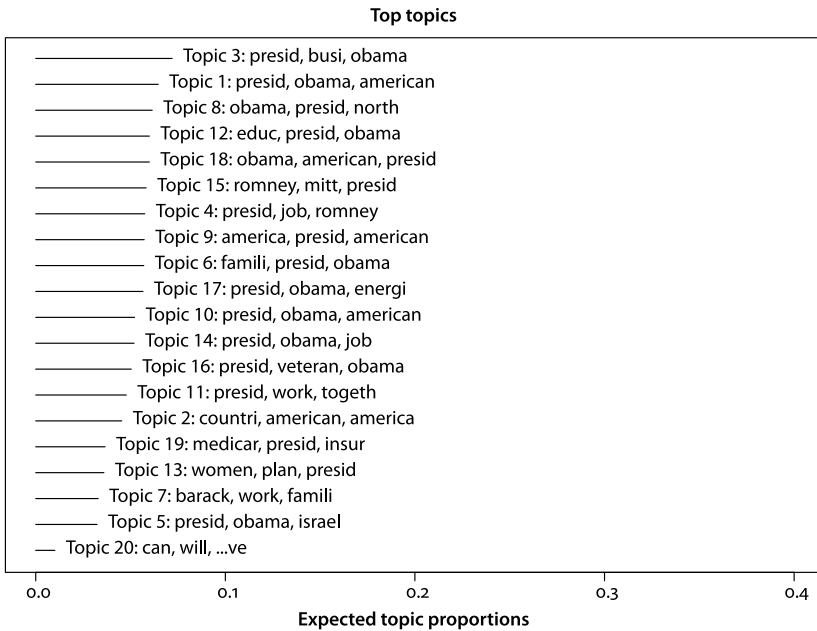


Figure 7. Structural topic model for 2012 Democrat National Convention

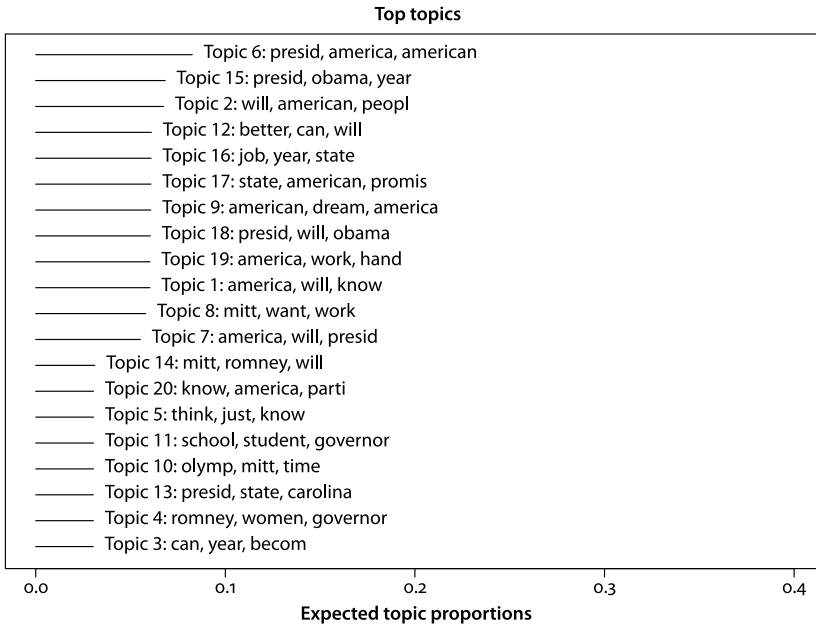


Figure 8. Structural topic model for 2012 Republican National Convention

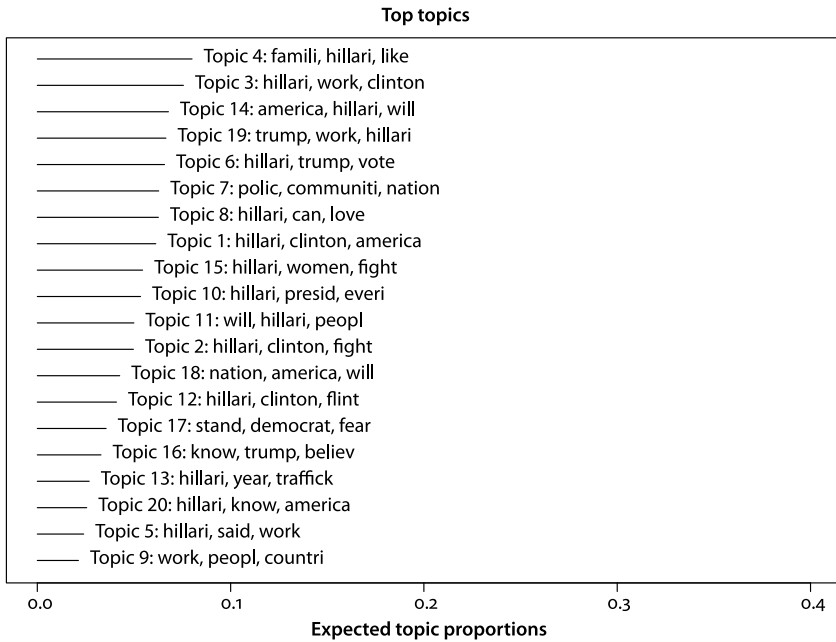


Figure 9. Structural topic model for 2016 Democrat National Convention

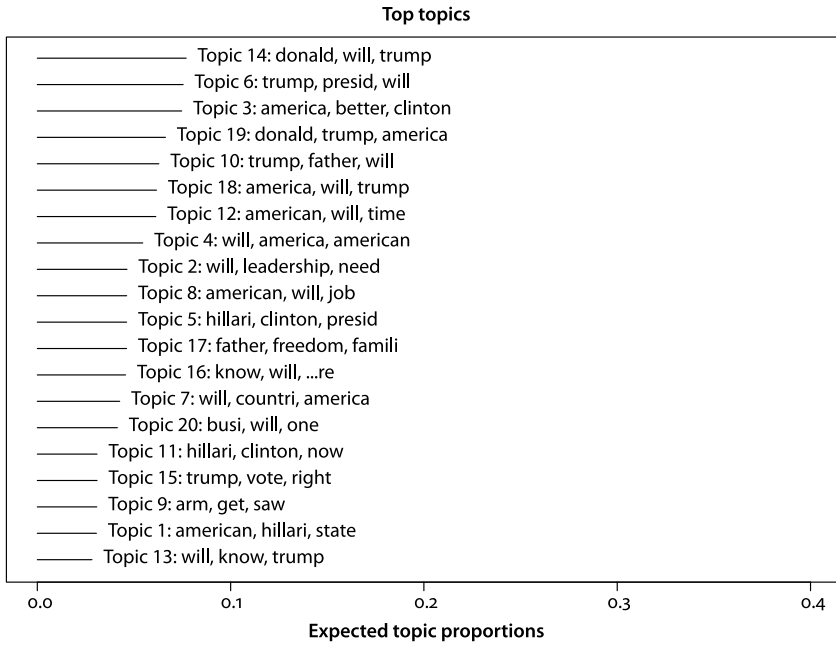


Figure 10. Structural topic model for 2016 Republican National Convention

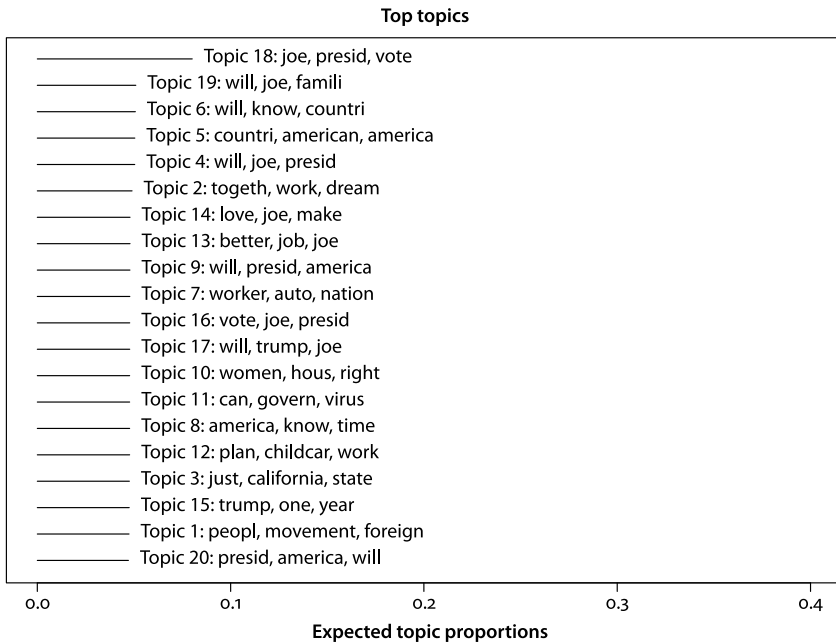


Figure 11. Structural topic model for 2020 Democrat National Convention

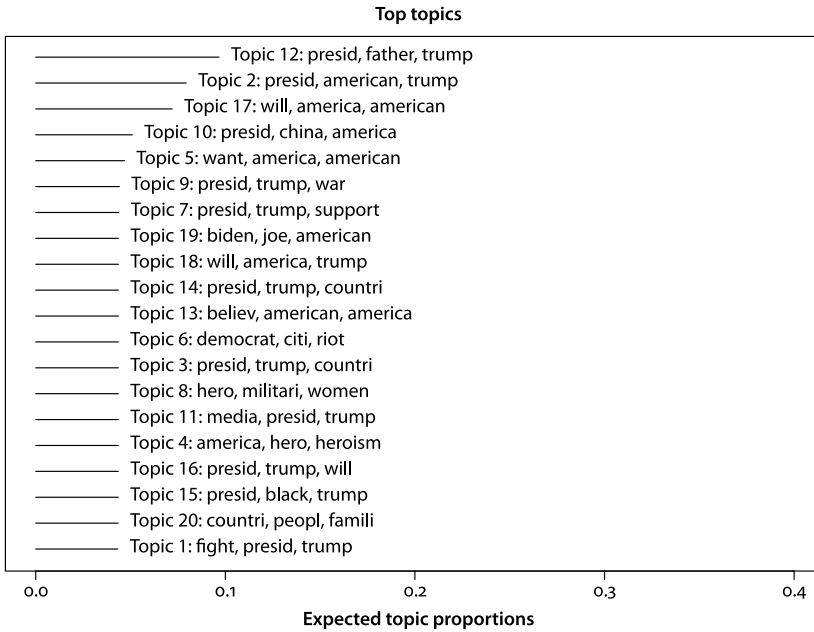


Figure 12. Structural topic model for 2020 Republican National Convention

### Appendix D. Examples of foundations in speeches

Table 5. Appeals to the Harm foundation

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Hillary Clinton	2008 DNC	“I haven’t spent the past 35 years in the trenches advocating for children, campaigning for universal health care, helping parents balance work and family, and fighting for women’s rights at home and around the world ... to see another Republican in the White House squander the promise of our country and the hopes of our people.”
John McCain	2008 RNC	“These are tough times for many of you. You’re worried about keeping your job or finding a new one, and are struggling to put food on the table and stay in your home. All you ever asked of government is to stand on your side, not in your way. And that’s just what I intend to do: stand on your side and fight for your future.”

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Elizabeth Bruce	2012 DNC	“When Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan make threats about “getting rid” of Planned Parenthood funding, it’s clear that they haven’t given a thought to women like me, women with limited resources who are sick and scared. They haven’t thought about planned and wanted babies like Ruby who are able to be here only because their mothers received the health care they needed.”
Rick Santorum	2012 RNC	“My grandfather, like millions of other immigrants, didn’t come here for some government guarantee of income equality or government benefits to take care of his family. In 1923 there were no government benefits for immigrants except one: Freedom!”
Tulsi Gabbard	2016 DNC	“Love which calls us to care for families torn apart by our criminal justice system; to care for folks whose jobs have vanished because of destructive trade deals; to care for those barely scraping by at minimum wage or crippled by college debt; to care about our environment and future generations; to care about lives lost, lives ruined, and countries destroyed by counterproductive regime change wars; to care for our veterans who face unacceptable delays and inadequate care.”
Patricia Smith	2016 RNC	“Donald Trump is everything Hillary Clinton is not. He is blunt, direct, and strong. He speaks his mind, and his heart. And, when it comes to the threat posed by radical Islamic terrorism, he will not hesitate to kill the terrorists who threaten American lives.”
Bernie Sanders	2020 DNC	“As long as I am here, I will work with progressives, with moderates, and yes, with conservatives to preserve this nation from a threat that so many of our heroes fought and died to defeat. This president is not just a threat to our democracy, but by rejecting science, he has put our lives and health in jeopardy. Trump has attacked doctors and scientists trying to protect us from the pandemic while refusing to take strong action to produce the masks, gowns, and gloves our healthcare workers desperately need. Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Trump golfs. His actions fanned this pandemic resulting in over 170,000 deaths and a nation still unprepared to protect its people.”

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Chen Guangcheng	2020 RNC	“Standing up to tyranny is not easy, I know. When I spoke out against China’s one-child policy and other injustices, I was prosecuted, beaten, sent to prison and put under house arrest by the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP. In April, 2012, I escaped and was given shelter in the American Embassy in Beijing. I’m forever grateful to the American people for welcoming me and my family to the United States, where we are now free.”

**Table 6.** Appeals to the Fairness foundation

Speaker	Convention	Quote
John Lewis	2008 DNC	“I was there that day when Dr. King delivered his historic speech before an audience of more than 250,000. I am the last remaining speaker from the March on Washington, and I was there when Dr. King urged this nation to lay down the burden of discrimination and segregation and move toward the creation of a more perfect union. On that day, his words and his example inspired an entire generation of the young and old, the rich and poor – people of all faiths, races, cultures and backgrounds – to believe that we had the power, we had the ability, and we had the capacity to make that dream a reality.”
Mike Huckabee	2008 RNC	“I grew up at a time and in a place where the civil rights movement was fought. I witnessed firsthand the shameful evil of racism. I saw how ignorance and prejudice caused people to do the unthinkable to people of color not so many years ago. So, I say with sincerity that I have great respect for Sen. Obama’s historic achievement to become his party’s nominee – not because of his color, but with indifference to it. Party or politics aside, we celebrate this milestone because it elevates our country.”
Karen Bass	2012 DNC	“Throughout the union, governors and legislators have proposed or passed laws to make it more difficult for individuals to cast their ballots. We must build and be part of a nation where ”justice” isn’t just a catch phrase, but embodies the equality and fairness that our nation’s founders envisioned.”

Speaker	Convention	Quote
John McCain	2012 RNC	“I trust Mitt Romney to know that good can triumph over evil, that justice can vanquish tyranny, that love can conquer hate, that the desire for freedom is eternal and universal, and that America is still the best hope of mankind. ”
Dynah Haubert	2016 DNC	“As a disabled person, I became a lawyer to advocate that disability is not a problem to be cured, but part of our identity and diversity. And that’s why, today – on the 26th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act – I’m with Her.”
Pam Bondi	2016 RNC	“Hillary will stack the Supreme Court with liberal justices who will allow government to continue its rampage against our individual rights, with utter contempt for our Second Amendment. I know Donald. He will appoint conservative justices who will defend, rather than rewrite, our Constitution. ”
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	2020 DNC	“A movement striving to recognize and repair the wounds of racial injustice, colonization, misogyny and homophobia. And to propose and build re-imagined systems of immigration and foreign policy that turn away from the violence and xenophobia of our past.”
Tiffany Trump	2020 RNC	“In short, our nation suffers by inhibiting our diversity of thought and inclusion of ideas. Working together outside of our political comfort zones will accomplish so much more. Some cynical politicians do not seem to believe in the miracle of America. Well, I do.”

Table 7. Appeals to the Ingroup foundation

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Edward Kennedy	2008 DNC	“Barack Obama will close the book on the old politics of race and gender and group against group and straight against gay.”
Lindsey Graham	2008 RNC	“Because losing in Iraq would have been a nightmare for America. Al-Qaida would have claimed victory over our nation. Sectarian violence would spread throughout the region. And Iran would fill the vacuum.”

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Jared Polis	2012 DNC	“And the America I believe in is the America Barack Obama believes in. It is the America you believe in. One where if you play by the rules and work hard, you can get ahead and succeed. One in which loving families of all forms are respected and celebrated as the backbone of society. One in which today’s divisions become tomorrow’s unity, in which we transcend partisan bickering and work together to forge a better future for ourselves and our families. Diversity is America’s strength, and only by working together, as one nation, can we form a more perfect union. That is why President Obama brought to Washington a vision for one America – an America in which we can overcome divisions of red and blue to make our country greater.”
Kelly Ayote	2012 RNC	“And I speak to you tonight with great concern – for our employees – their families – my family – and your family. My concern is that President Obama is making it very difficult for small businesses to get started – to create jobs – and to survive.”
Khizr Khan	2016 DNC	“Have you ever been to Arlington Cemetery? Go look at the graves of brave patriots who died defending the United States of America. You will see all faiths, genders and ethnicities. You have sacrificed nothing and no one. We cannot solve our problems by building walls, sowing division. We are stronger together. And we will keep getting stronger when Hillary Clinton becomes our President.”
Dan Sullivan	2016 RNC	“We will put coal miners and oil drillers back to work, not target them for extinction as Hillary promised. We MUST reignite economic opportunity and the American dream for everybody. And TOGETHER we WILL make America great again”
Pete Buttigieg	2020 DNC	“I believe in this country because America uniquely holds the promise of a place where everyone can belong. We know that for too many and for too long, that promise has been denied. But we also know America is at its best. When we make that circle of belonging wider.”



Speaker	Convention	Quote
Melania Trump	2020 RNC	“...I’d like to call on the citizens of this country to take a moment, pause, and look at things from all perspectives. I urge people to come together in a civil manner so we can work and live up to our standard American ideals. I also ask people to stop the violence and looting being done in the name of justice, and never make assumptions based on the color of a person’s skin.”

Table 8. Appeals to the Authority foundation

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Bill Richardson	2008 DNC	“It’s time we had a president committed to fighting poverty in the Third World and ending the genocide in Darfur; who leads international efforts to stop global warming, strengthens our friendship with Mexico and Latin America, and stands behind Israel with full-time diplomacy to achieve peace in the Middle East; a president who ends the global scourge of AIDS in our time and sets an example of moral leadership by following our Constitution, shutting down Guantanamo and ending torture.”
Fred Thompson	2008 RNC	“The respect he is given around the world is not because of a teleprompter speech designed to appeal to American critics abroad but because of decades of clearly demonstrated character and statesmanship. There has been no time in our nation’s history, since we first pledged allegiance to the American flag, when the character, judgment and leadership of our president was more important.”
Jason Crow	2012 DNC	“I now live with my wife and son in Colorado, but many of the men and women with whom I served never returned home. And others came home bearing visible and invisible scars of battle. When they and their families needed help, our commander-in-chief was there for them, from expanding veterans’ benefits to strengthening the VA health system.”

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Newt and Collieta Gingrich	2012 RNC	“Over three decades have passed since Ronald Reagan was first elected to the White House, yet the impact of his leadership is still evident today. While in office, President Reagan had three major goals: To restore the economy; to revive the American spirit; and to defeat totalitarianism, spreading democracy throughout the world. By remaining true to his convictions, through his belief in the American people and with tremendous optimism, President Reagan achieved these goals. It’s striking how President Carter and President Obama both took our nation down a path that in four years weakened America’s confidence in itself and our hope for a better future.”
Charles Ramsey	2016 DNC	“Hillary Clinton is the strong leader to protect our cops and communities from gun violence. She has stood with our first responders when we needed her most. In the days after September 11th. In making sure they got the benefits they had earned. And today, she supports comprehensive background checks and the assault weapons ban. Those who aim to do harm shouldn’t get a handgun, let alone an assault rifle.”
Marcus Luttrell	2016 RNC	“Americans know that each of us has a duty, and we’re ready to do it. Every one of us has to step up in some way. We need leaders to step up in government... citizens to step up and hold leaders accountable... and some will have to step up and answer the call of service. Whether that means fighting on a foreign field of battle like I did, or protecting and serving on our own city streets... everyone who keeps America safe deserves our respect.”
Colin Powell	2020 DNC	“Our country needs a Commander in Chief who takes care of our troops in the same way he would his own family. For Joe Biden that doesn’t need teaching, it comes from the experience he shares with millions of military families, sending his beloved son off to war and praying to God he would come home safe. Joe Biden will be a president that we will all be proud to salute.”

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Rudy Giuliani	2020 RNC	“It is clear that a vote for Biden and the Democrats creates the risk that you will bring this lawlessness to your city, to your town, to your suburb. There is no question that this awesome job of restoring safety for our people cannot be done from your basement, Joe. There’s also no question that President Trump will fight with all his strengths to preserve the American system of government and our way of life.”

Table 9. Appeals to the Purity foundation

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Nancy Pelosi	2008 DNC	“Barack Obama’s dream is the American Dream. He gives us renewed faith in a vision of the future that is free of the constraints of the tired policies of the past – a vision that is new and bold and calls forth the best in the American people.”
George W. Bush	2008 RNC	“In the time the Oval Office has been in my trust, I have kept near my desk reminders of America’s character – including a painting of a West Texas mountain lit by the morning sun. It reminds me that Americans have always lived on the sunrise side of the mountain. We are a nation that looks to the new day with confidence and optimism. I am optimistic about our future, because I believe in the goodness and wisdom of the American people. I am optimistic because I have faith in freedom’s power to lift up all of God’s children and lead this world to a future of peace.”
Simone Campbell	2012 DNC	“During our journey, I rediscovered a few truths. First, Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan are correct when they say that each individual should be responsible. But their budget goes astray in not acknowledging that we are responsible not only for ourselves and our immediate families. Rather, our faith strongly affirms that we are all responsible for one another.”
Mike Huckabee	2012 RNC	“The attack on my Catholic brothers and sisters is an attack on me. The Democrats have brought back the old dance the “Limbo” to see how low they can go in attempting to limit our ability to practice our faith.”

---

Speaker	Convention	Quote
Sherman Jackson	2016 DNC	“Our times call for the very best from our political leaders. Guide them, O God, to their very highest selves. Teach them that of all the things that nations produce, none is more beloved to You than justice tempered with compassion. As a Muslim sage once put it: “God will aid a just nation, even if it is unbelieving; and God will not aid an unjust nation even if it is believing.” Many nations, due to arrogance, heedlessness, or just bad leadership, have been blinded to this truth. Please, God, do not place us among such nations.”
Tony Parkin	2016 RNC	“Our freedom to appeal to and unite under God has been under steady assault. This is why we must stop those in our government and on our courts who have either in principle or in practice attempted to remove these two words, “under God” and all that they mean from public life.”
Andrew Cuomo	2020 DNC	“We climbed the impossible mountain, and right now we are on the other side. We did it with the kindness and assistance of so many. New Yorkers want to thank everyone who came to our aid, 30,000 Americans who volunteered to come here to help in our hour of need. Your love gave us the strength to carry on. We went through hell, but we have learned much. We know that our problems go beyond the COVID virus. COVID is the symptom, not the illness. Our nation is in crisis. And in many ways, COVID is just a metaphor. A virus attacks when the body is weak and when it cannot defend itself. Over these past few years, America’s body politic has been weakened. The divisions have been growing deeper.”
Jack Brewer	2020 RNC	“Our president has made incredible strides to end mass incarceration and give unprecedented opportunities for black in America to rise. America, let this election be a call for all God’s people who are called by his name to humble ourselves and pray together, and to seek his face and to turn from our wicked ways.”


---

*Address for correspondence*

Jennifer Lin  
Political Science  
Northwestern University  
601 University Place  
Evanston, IL 60208  
United States  
jenniferlin2025@u.northwestern.edu

*Biographical notes*

**Jennifer Lin** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Political Science and is affiliated with the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. She studies American politics, specifically focused on political psychology, political behavior and public opinion. She applies computational social science methods to her research.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0661-6995>

*Publication history*

Date received: 15 October 2022  
Date accepted: 1 February 2024  
Published online: 8 March 2024