

Party Foul: The Effectiveness of Political Value Rhetoric is Constrained by Party Ownership

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Abstract. Politicians use political value rhetoric to win elections or persuade constituents towards policy positions, but the effectiveness of this rhetoric is unclear. I argue that partisan forces constrain the effectiveness of this rhetoric and that this constraint is conditional based on the value evoked and the match between the politician's and message recipient's partisanship. To examine this, I conduct a survey experiment with a diverse U.S. national population and show that politicians' value rhetoric is disproportionately evaluated based on the value evoked as well as whether the politician is in-party or out-party: in-party politicians are punished—and out-party politicians rewarded—for trespassing on the other party's values. I then use individual-level variables to examine what drives this result, finding that both party-congruent value endorsements and affective polarization levels moderate the asymmetric responses to political value trespassing. Lastly, I replicate this experiment and reproduce the same findings. The results speak to political values, the effectiveness of political rhetoric, party betrayal signaling, and the true object of out-party distaste, which seems to be more about the party than the party member.

Key Words: political values; party ownership; political parties; political rhetoric; polarization

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Introduction

Politicians use value rhetoric—arguments appealing to the underlying beliefs that shape our political attitudes—to win elections or persuade constituents towards certain policy positions (e.g., Clifford and Jerit 2013; Clifford et al. 2015; Day et al. 2014; DeMora et al. 2021; Druckman 2001; Feinberg and Willer 2015; Nelson and Garst 2005; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997; Voelkel and Feinberg 2018). The public often hears, for example, Democrats referencing the value of equality and Republicans referencing the value of self-reliance—political values that are associated with their respective parties (see Goren et al. 2009). Sometimes, presumably to broaden their appeal, they may switch: for example, Democrats may reference self-reliance and Republicans may reference equality (see Voelkel and Feinberg 2018 who examine this with moral values).

It is unclear, however, if attempts such as these to “trespass” on the other party’s political values “work.” Does value trespassing lead both in-party and out-party members to evaluate a candidate more positively? Does value trespassing backfire—that is, lead both in-party and out-party members to rate the candidate more negatively? Or, do these attempts lead to conditional outcomes: for example, leading in-party members to more positively evaluate trespassing candidates, but out-party members to more negatively evaluate them (or vice versa: leading to more positive evaluations among out-party members but negative evaluations among in-party members)?

In this piece I examine the effects of what I term “political value trespassing” on candidate evaluations. Previous research suggests various—sometimes competing—hypotheses regarding how people should react to this type of rhetoric. On the one hand, political value rhetoric—

including value trespassing—could be highly beneficial. Nelson and Garst (2005), for example, note that references to political values can be “powerful and reliable weapons in the persuader’s arsenal,” and it is possible that trespassing on the other party’s values could indeed broaden politicians’ appeal—making them more likeable among out-partisans while still maintaining in-party members’ support. Yet it is also possible that trespassing on the other party’s values could send a confusing message and thus alienate in-party members as well as fail to win over out-party members. As Condor, Tileagă, and Billig (2013) explain, “the fact that the key terms of political debate are essentially contestable means that although speakers often *treat* appeals to values such as fairness, the national interest, or human rights as if they were noncontentious, there is no guarantee that their audience will necessarily accept their argument” (pg. 273).

Indeed, attempts such as these that try to “trespass” by utilizing something that is associated with the other party (e.g., issues, traits, values, and even gender) find some level of punishment from trespassing because it violates expectations (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Bauer 2019; Hayes 2005; Herrnson et al. 2003; Nelson and Garst 2005). In these cases, politicians need to meet the public’s expectations. When they break with them (i.e., when they trespass on the other party), their rhetoric either fails at pleasing both in-party and out-party members or backfires among them because the rhetoric seems like “insincere pandering” (Nelson and Garst 2005). It is thus possible that—because certain values are associated with certain parties (see Goren et al. 2009)—when politicians attempt to use the other party’s political values, they are punished with decreased support among both in-party and out-party members because this breaks with people’s expectations. Indeed, this is what Nelson and Garst (2005) find.

The aforementioned two possibilities—that political value trespassing works or that it does not work—do not take into account the significant increases in affective polarization (Iyengar et

al. 2019) and the development of negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018), however. In fact, individual partisanship plays little role in the first possibility and in the second possibility only matters with regard to expectation: politicians are rewarded for using values that people associate with their party but punished for using values that people associate with the opposing party—by *both* in-party and out-party members. Yet research suggests that partisanship is more than a summary of issues, traits, and values, but also a strong and important social identity (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002): even aside from substantive differences, some partisans harbor positive affect toward their own party and animosity toward the other party (see Mason 2015), or even simply animosity toward the other party (see Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018).

The importance of partisanship as a social identity, partisan polarization, and negative partisanship should thus affect how people perceive political rhetoric, including political value rhetoric. And it could do so in two distinct ways. First, it could render political value rhetoric meaningless—meaning that no matter what political value a politician uses, in-party politicians will be evaluated more positively and out-party politicians will be evaluated more negatively. In fact, even if politicians are rewarded and punished for their particular political value rhetoric, in-party politicians could still always be rated more highly than out-party politicians. This may especially be the case given that much of the distaste towards the out-party is directed at elites (see Druckman and Levendusky 2019 and Kingzette 2021).

But it is also possible that polarization creates a different dynamic: the desire to see out-party leaders defy their party. Indeed, if political values are in fact social signals of group identification (see Connors 2020), it is possible that when politicians reference political values they are also signaling either party loyalty (if the value is an in-party value) or party betrayal (if the value is an out-party value). This would suggest that reactions to value trespassing should be

highly dependent on individual partisanship. Indeed, research suggests that partisans enjoy witnessing out-party members betray their party, but are highly critical of in-party politicians who do the same (Kane 2019a, 2019b). Thus, this research would predict that when in-party politicians trespass on the other party's political values, they will be punished—but that when *out-party* politicians trespass on the other party's political values, they will be *rewarded*.

I proceed as follows. First, I integrate research on various dimensions of partisanship to demonstrate why we might predict different outcomes from political value trespassing. This leads to three hypotheses, which I then test with a survey experiment and a replication of this experiment. I find that politicians are indeed differentially evaluated—rewarded versus punished—based on the values they use as well as whether they are an in-party or out-party member: while in-party politicians are punished for signaling party betrayal, out-party politicians are rewarded for it. Lastly, I use individual-level variables to examine what drives this effect, finding that both party-congruent value endorsements and affective polarization levels moderate the differential reactions to political value trespassing. I close with implications of these findings, including the suggestion that the true object of out-party distaste is the *party* rather than the party *member* or even the party *elite*.

Theoretic Expectations

Political Values. Traditionally, political values are thought of as broad concepts about how the world should work that provide people with a standard for evaluating politics (see Caprara and Vecchione 2013). Political values are viewed as different from political attitudes in that the former can be applied to multiple issues rather than just a position on one issue. For example, it is not a

value to support welfare, but one can value equality, which will likely lead to supporting welfare. This same value—equality—can also inform attitudes towards, for example, taxes, where valuing equality will likely lead to supporting a progressive tax. Political values are thus viewed as broader than political attitudes and have been found to guide political attitudes and behavior (Feldman and Zaller 1992; see also Ciuk, Lupton, and Thornton 2018; Lupton and McKee 2020; Lupton, Smallpage and Enders 2020), predicting positions on social welfare (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001), government spending, candidate evaluations (Feldman 1988), beliefs about racial equality (Kinder and Sanders 1996), judgments on tolerance (Peffley, Knigge, and Hurwitz 2001), and affective polarization (Enders and Lupton 2020).¹

Referencing political values in rhetoric is reasonable given that—as Goren et al. (2009) explain—“political values are quite popular, [so] the perceptual background surrounding them is positive.” Elites aiming to persuade should highlight the facets of an issue that give their side “the rhetorical edge” (Jerit 2008; see also Riker 1996), and political value rhetoric could in fact be that edge (see Nelson and Garst 2005). Indeed, as Feldman (2013) explains, “Since values refer to a preferable mode of conduct or desirable end-state, it is likely that an individual will positively evaluate most, if not all values” (pg. 603). This research suggests that—given political values’ positive valence—politicians could be rewarded for using political value rhetoric, no matter the value. This may especially be the case when political value rhetoric does not explicitly pit values *against* one another, as people’s value systems are believed to be transitive (i.e., people rank values over one another—see, for example, Ciuk 2016; Ciuk and Jacoby 2015).

¹ Political values are related to, but distinct from, human values, where the latter are broader, more durable, and perhaps even shape the former (see Schwartz et al. 2014 for discussion). Because of these differences, it is unclear if findings here on political values would replicate with human values.

Similarly, it is also possible that political value rhetoric could work disproportionately based on one's endorsement of the particular value being used in the rhetoric, as research has found that framing an issue as relevant to a particular value can persuade those who prioritize that value (Druckman 2001; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Nelson, Oxley, and Clawson 1997). Thus, research on political values would suggest that either political value trespassing is generally effective (because political values have a positive valence) or that it is conditionally effective among those who endorse the particular political value being used (i.e., that value endorsement drives ratings of politicians).

Party Ownership. However, the possibility that political values are owned by political parties—something that previous research suggests (e.g., Goren et al. 2009) and I replicate—implies more complication to the effectiveness of political value rhetoric. The idea of value ownership is analogous to issue ownership (Egan 2013; Petrocik 1996), which argues that political parties strategically adopt (i.e., “own”) certain issues and political campaigns serve to prime individuals of their party's owned issues in hopes of increasing their popularity. The fact that certain issues are owned by political parties means that referencing these issues is only conditionally effective, and this effectiveness depends on whether that issue is the politician's party's issue (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Belander and Meguid 2008; Bellucci 2006; Clarke 2004; Egan 2013; Nadeau et al. 2001; Petrocik 1996; Thesen et al. 2016; van der Brug 2004). If a candidate uses their party's owned issue, they are awarded greater support. However, if a candidate uses the opposing party's owned issue (i.e., trespasses), they are punished with decreased support. In other words, candidates cannot simply “ride the wave” and adopt every consensus issue—their party needs to have a

reputation that fits with that issue (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; although see Norpoth and Buchanan 1992).

This idea of issue ownership has been extended to examine asymmetric rewards and punishment dependent on not only partisanship and issues, but also traits, gender, and values (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Bauer 2019; Hayes 2005, 2011; Herrnson et al. 2003; Nelson and Garst 2005). Nelson and Garst (2005), for example, find that value rhetoric can backfire if it runs counter to expectations (e.g., if a Republican discusses egalitarianism or a Democrat discusses Protestant ethic), as it seems disingenuous. They explain this finding by arguing that because of sinking trust in political leaders, “language that strikes of insincere pandering will not sit well with many citizens” (see also Druckman 2001). Indeed, they find that out-party messages were only rejected when they evoked the “wrong” values.²

Overall, though, research on party ownership reaches no consensus on the effectiveness of partisan trespassing—some find it to be successful (e.g., Hayes 2005), while others find it to backfire (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994) or be inconsequential (Norpoth and Buchanan 1992). This research *does* suggest, however, that if political values are indeed owned by political parties, political value rhetoric may have more limited persuasive power. Party ownership research suggests, for example, that politicians may be rewarded for using their own party’s values and punished for value trespassing (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Nelson and Garst 2005). This literature thus gives me my first hypothesis: that politicians are rewarded for using their own party’s values but punished for using the other party’s values because this breaks with expectations (the “Expectancy Violations Hypothesis”):

² When evoking the expected values, the partisanship of the speaker did not predict attitudes or behavioral intentions (see Nelson and Garst 2005, pg. 506).

Hypothesis 1 (Expectancy Violations Hypothesis): Politicians will be rewarded for using their own party's values but punished for using the opposing party's values.

Polarization and Negative Partisanship. Note that while in Hypothesis 1 partisanship matters, it matters just in regard to the party's *ownership* of the particular value (i.e., expectation). But partisanship is a strong social identity (Green et al. 2002) that has become increasingly important over the past half century, leading to rising affective polarization (Iyengar et al. 2019) and the development of negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, 2018), especially toward out-party elites (Druckman and Levendusky 2019). Indeed, partisanship is pivotal in shaping how people evaluate the world (Arceneaux 2008; Bartels 2000, 2002; Bullock 2009; Campbell et al. 1960; Cohen 2003; Green et al. 2002; Kam 2005; Rahn 1993; Snyder and Ting 2002). Thus, it is likely that the party match between the speaker (i.e., the politician) and the message recipient will matter. People should not only respond differently when politicians are endorsing their own party's versus the opposing party's values (as the Expectancy Violations Hypothesis predicts), but *also* when that political value rhetoric is coming from an in-party versus an out-party politician.

Whether the politician is in-party or out-party may affect how people perceive political value rhetoric in two possible ways. First, it is possible—given the state of polarization—that people will rate their own party's candidate higher than the out-party's candidate, no matter the political value the candidate endorses. The result would be that in-party candidates are evaluated more positively than out-party candidates regardless of who endorses their own party's values or who trespasses. In other words, in no case would out-party candidates be evaluated more positively than in-party candidates. It is possible in this scenario that candidates are still rewarded and

punished for the political values that they use—just that partisanship matters more than political value rhetoric does. This brings me to my second hypothesis (the “Polarization Hypothesis”): that no matter the value used, in-party politicians will always be rated more highly than out-party politicians:

Hypothesis 2 (Polarization Hypothesis): In-party politicians will be rated more highly than out-party politicians, no matter the political value they each endorse.

Note that this hypothesis does not conflict with Hypothesis 1—it could both be the case that politicians are rewarded for using their own party’s values but punished for using the opposing party’s values (Hypothesis 1), as well as the case that in-party politicians are rated more highly than out-party politicians, no matter the value they endorse (Hypothesis 2).

However, it is *also* possible that polarization and negative partisanship work differently than explained above. Rather than leading partisans to constantly punish out-party politicians for being out-party politicians (Hypothesis 2), it is possible that polarization could lead partisans to *reward* out-party politicians for breaking with their party because they enjoy seeing disunity among the out-party (Kane 2019a, 2019b). In this case, we would see differential effects of political value trespassing by whether the politician’s party matches the message recipient’s party. That is, *in-party* elites would be rewarded for sticking with their party’s values and punished for breaking with them (Hypothesis 1)—but the reverse would be true of out-party elites, who would be *punished* for sticking with their party’s values and *rewarded* for breaking with them. This is the third hypothesis (the “Differential Effects Hypothesis”):

Hypothesis 3 (Differential Effects Hypothesis): In-party politicians will be rewarded for using their own party's values and punished for value trespassing (following Hypothesis 1), but out-party politicians will be *punished* for using their own party's values and *rewarded* for value trespassing.

Note that Hypothesis 3 relies on Hypothesis 1 being supported *but only for in-partisans*. And, just like with Hypotheses 1 and 2, it is possible that both Hypotheses 2 and 3 are supported. It could be the case that in-party politicians are evaluated more positively than out-party politicians, no matter the value used (Hypothesis 2), as well as the case that there are differential effects of value trespassing by whether the politician is in-party or out-party (Hypothesis 3).

Preliminary Check

First, though, I conduct a check of political value ownership—verifying previous findings on Democrats' and Republicans' ownership of political values (e.g., Goren 2005; Goren et al. 2009) with two surveys that examine if the public perceives party ownership of political values and a content analysis to see if political parties use these values in their rhetoric. Although details are in the appendices (Appendices A, B, C, and D), here I briefly note the main findings. First, in a design that mimics Egan (2013) with participants from Qualtrics (N=1,710; April, 2017), respondents were asked in random order which party is better at handling equality, moral traditionalism, and self-reliance. Similarly, with participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk; N=152; January, 2018), respondents were asked in random order which party is better at handling equality, moral tolerance, self-reliance, moral traditionalism, freedom, patriotism, economic security, social

order, individualism, and limited government. Results from Qualtrics are in Appendix B and results from Mturk are shown below (details in Appendix C)—both find that the public perceives certain values as being owned by political parties (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Mturk Participants’ Perception of Party Value Ownership

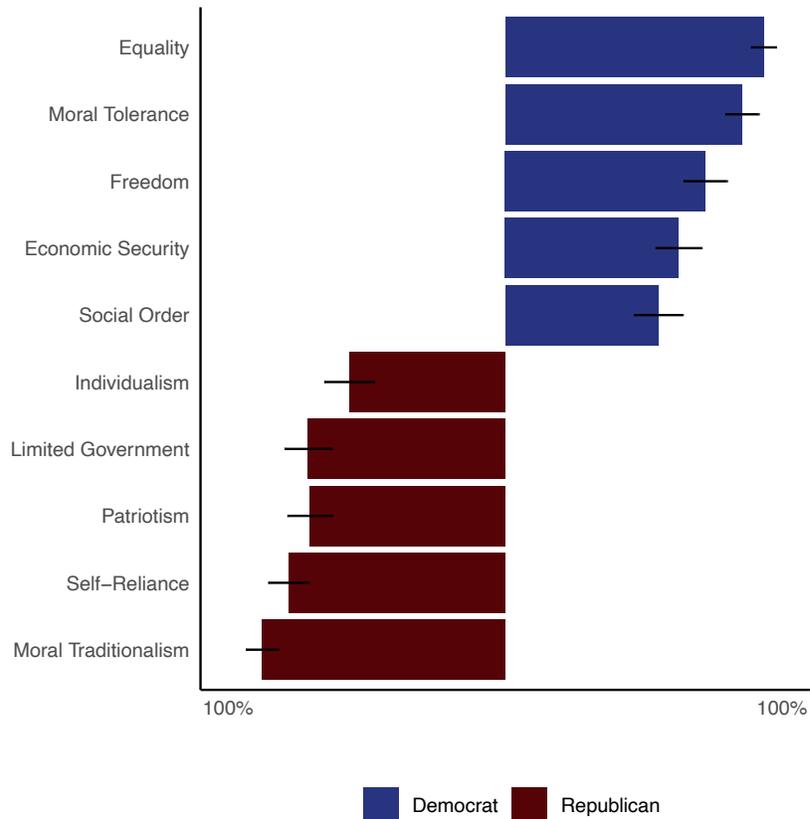


Figure shows the percent of respondents who chose the Democratic (blue) or Republican (red) parties, with 95% confidence intervals for each of the values. Figure shows that the Democratic Party “owns” equality, moral tolerance, freedom, economic security, and social order, and that the Republican Party “owns” moral traditionalism, self-reliance, patriotism, limited government, and individualism.

Lastly, using a content analysis of 2014 Senate and House race advertisements from Wesleyan Media Project, I find that politicians often use the values that the public perceives they own in their rhetoric, although the strength of this ownership varies by value and party (details in Appendix D).

In fact, the three most oft-used values are self-reliance, patriotism, and equality, and there are significant gaps in which party uses these values, with Republicans more often using self-reliance ($p < .001$) and patriotism ($p < .001$) and Democrats more often using equality ($p < .001$). Further, these data show that Democrats are most likely to trespass on self-reliance and Republicans are most likely to trespass on equality — values that I use in the main experiment. In sum, my check validates that political values are owned by political parties and motivates the subsequent experiment.

Survey Experiment on Dynata

Next I test my main hypotheses to examine how people react to politicians who trespass on the other party's values. Here, I have three non-mutually exclusive hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 (the "Expectancy Violations Hypothesis") is that politicians will be rewarded for using their own party's values but punished for value trespassing. Hypothesis 2 (the "Polarization Hypothesis") is that in-party politicians will be rated more highly than out-party politicians, no matter the value they endorse. Lastly, Hypothesis 3 (the "Differential Effects Hypothesis") is that *in-party* politicians will be rewarded for using their own party's values and punished for value trespassing (following Hypothesis 1), but that the opposite will be true for *out-party* politicians, who will be punished for using their own party's values and rewarded for value trespassing.

Design. I empirically examine these hypotheses using a non-probability sample of US adults recruited online from Dynata in June of 2018 (N=998).³ Participants in the study were first redirected to Qualtrics (the survey platform), given a consent form, and asked various demographic questions. They were then randomly assigned to one of four conditions, varying the candidate's partisanship (in-party or out-party) and the value evoked (equality or self-reliance).⁴ Thus, they were randomly assigned to read about either: 1) a Democratic candidate evoking equality; 2) a Democratic candidate evoking self-reliance; 3) a Republican candidate evoking equality; or 4) a Republican candidate evoking self-reliance. The value trespassing conditions are when the Democrat evokes self-reliance and the Republican evokes equality.

Participants in all conditions were told, “We would like to tell you about a [Democratic / Republican] candidate running for Congress and ask you some questions about his campaign slogan.”⁵ Then, participants were given the campaign slogan. For the equality conditions, this was: “I think this country was built on the value of equality. And sometimes equality means that hard-working people need some help.” For the self-reliance conditions, this was: “I think this country was built on the value of self-reliance. Our country and our citizens would be much better off if

³ Dynata is an online market research firm that recruits participants to take surveys for compensation and prides itself on data quality (see <https://www.dynata.com/dynatas-world-class-quality/>). See Appendices E and F for demographic comparisons to nationally-representative data.

⁴ This was done using block randomization by party.

⁵ Because gender could matter here (see, e.g., Bauer 2019; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003), I kept gender constant as male.

there were more emphasis on hard work.”⁶ The treatments aimed to minimize differences between conditions, but out of necessity required varying the definition of equality and self-reliance.

Participants were then asked to rate the candidate on various dimensions, aiming to capture different aspects of a candidate’s favorability, including general likability, competence, qualifications, integrity, strength, representation, and leadership. While these are not exhaustive aspects of a candidate’s favorability, they attempt to cover qualities that voters may care about in choosing who to support—if respondents rate candidates high on these dimensions, they are probably likely to support them, whereas if respondents rate candidates low on these dimensions they are probably *unlikely* to support them. Thus, respondents were asked how much they liked the candidate (from strongly dislike [1] to strongly like [5]), as well as “how well do you think the following phrases describe him”: 1) a competent individual, 2) qualified to hold office, 3) a person who lacks integrity, 4) a weak public servant, 5) someone who does not represent his constituents, and 6) a leader on national issues. These six phrases were randomly ordered, and respondents were given five response options to each that ranged from extremely well to not at all well with the additional option of “no idea” (full survey in Appendix E).

These 7 measures work together (Cronbach’s alpha = .74) and largely measure one latent construct, as intended (see Appendix E for factor analysis). Thus, the dependent variable was then created by recoding “no idea” and skipped responses at the mid-point⁷, recoding each variable from 0 to 1 so that higher values indicated greater favorability, and merging these variables into a

⁶ This design used deception in that respondents were told about a candidate and slogan that did not exist. This deception was low risk and was necessary in order to have control over various factors in the study. Participants (in both studies) were debriefed at the end of the survey.

⁷ See Appendix E for details.

summary index that was again recoded to range from 0 to 1, from low to high favorability (mean: 0.66, standard deviation: 0.14).

Note that, given the design, there was no control condition. It would not have been feasible (or believable) to ask participants about a candidate with *no* information and *no* campaign slogan—the results from this condition would have been meaningless. Yet adding more information to a control condition would have naturally removed the very point of the control: a baseline condition. Thus, all comparisons are between the four treatment groups. Also note that because the conditions are reliant on associating with a party, pure independents are removed from the analysis (see Druckman and Levendusky 2019 for a similar approach). Leaning independents are grouped with their leaning party.

Main Results. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the mean favorability (i.e., the summation of the seven standardized questions) of the candidate by whether he was portrayed as an in-party or out-party candidate and whether he was endorsing an owned value (i.e., a Democrat endorsing equality or a Republican endorsing self-reliance) or a trespassed value (i.e., a Democrat endorsing self-reliance or a Republican endorsing equality).

I first examine Hypothesis 1 (the “Expectancy Violations Hypothesis”)—that politicians will be rewarded for using their own party’s values but punished for value trespassing. Looking at the first two rows in Table 1 (all candidates using a trespassed versus an owned value), I see no support for Hypothesis 1. When both in-party and out-party candidates are grouped together, they are on average rated the same whether the value is an owned value or a trespassed value ($p=.533$).

Next, I examine Hypothesis 2 (the “Polarization Hypothesis”)—that in-party politicians will be evaluated more positively than out-party politicians, no matter the value they endorse.

Figure 1, as well as the bottom four set of rows in Table 1, shows that there is no support for this hypothesis either. In fact, while on average in-party politicians are rated (slightly) more highly than out-party politicians (.68 versus .64, $p < .001$), when I break the ratings down by the value used, I see that the *out*-party candidate who value trespasses is rated *more* favorably than the in-party candidate who value trespasses (.67 versus .65, $p = .036$).

Lastly, I examine Hypothesis 3 (the “Differential Effects Hypothesis”)—that in-party politicians will be rewarded for using their own party’s values but punished for value trespassing (following Hypothesis 1), but that the opposite will be true for out-party politicians, who will be punished for using their own party’s values but rewarded for value trespassing. Figure 1, as well as the last four rows in Table 1, show support for this hypothesis. While the in-party candidate is evaluated more positively when endorsing their party’s owned value than when breaking with it (.71 versus .65, $p < .001$), the *out*-party candidate is evaluated more positively when *breaking* with their party’s owned value than when endorsing it (.67 versus .62, $p < .001$).

Table 1. Candidate Favorability by Out-Party vs. In-Party and Trespassed Value vs. Owned Value

	Condition	Observations	Mean	SE	T-Statistic	P-Value
All	Trespassed Value	505	.66	.01	0.62	.533
Candidates	Owned Value	493	.66	.01		
Outparty	Trespassed Value	237	.67	.01	4.40	.000
Candidate	Owned Value	248	.62	.01		
Inparty	Trespassed Value	268	.65	.01	5.18	.000
Candidate	Owned Value	245	.71	.01		

Table shows mean favorability (0-1) of the candidates by the value they endorse and whether they are in-party or out-party (data from bottom four rows are also in Figure 1). For main comparisons, t-test statistics and corresponding p-values are also reported. Table shows that in-party candidates are punished for value trespassing while outparty candidates are rewarded for it.

Figure 2. Candidate Favorability by Out-Party vs. In-Party and Trespassed vs. Owned Value

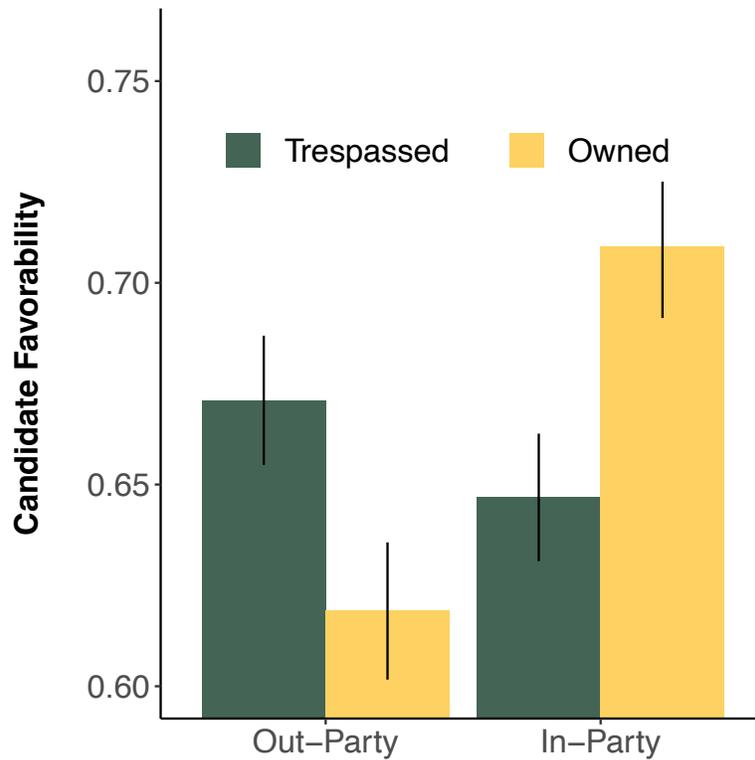


Figure shows mean favorability (0-1) of the candidates by the value they endorse and whether they are in-party or out-party (data also in bottom four rows of Table 1). 95% confidence intervals reported. Figure shows that in-party candidates are punished for value trespassing while outparty candidates are rewarded for it.

I then examine if results differ by dependent variable measure. To do this, I first run an OLS regression predicting favorability by an interaction between in-party candidate (dummy variable: 0=out-party, 1=in-party) and trespassed value (dummy variable: 0=owned value, 1=trespassed value) with robust standard errors. I then run this model with each dependent variable measure as a separate dependent variable and find the same results (see Appendix E).

Moderators and Alternative Explanation. Overall, then, the experimental results and robustness checks give support for the Differential Effects Hypothesis—that in-party politicians are punished, and out-party politicians rewarded, for value trespassing. Next, I examine two potential moderating

variables—which could give insight into what motivates these differential effects—as well as test an alternative explanation.

First, it is possible that findings are shaped by endorsements of party-congruent values. That is, that Democrats (Republicans) care about who is endorsing equality (self-reliance)⁸—and that this motivates candidate support, thus driving the differential effect. Second, it is possible that findings are shaped by feelings of party loyalty or betrayal—an identity- or group-based mechanism similar to what Kane (2019a, 2019b) finds, but with political values. This could be the case because political value endorsement signals party membership (Connors 2020), and thus candidates using their party’s values could signal party loyalty while trespassing could signal party betrayal—something that in-party members would punish and out-party members would reward (see Kane 2019a and Kane 2019b).

Both moderators would demonstrate different underlying motivations. The first would suggest that findings are the result of partisans endorsing their party’s values and reflecting that in candidate evaluations—i.e., Democrats (Republicans) rewarding equality (self-reliance) rhetoric and punishing self-reliance (equality) rhetoric. The second would suggest that findings are the result of polarization and negative partisanship, with values being yet another way to signal party loyalty versus betrayal.

Yet there is an alternative explanation for the results: that political values signal the underlying ideology of the candidates, and thus that effects are driven by the fact that a Democrat (Republican) endorsing equality (self-reliance) is signaling that they are liberal (conservative). This would suggest a story about policy and ideology rather than one about values and groups.

⁸ Either because of deeply held beliefs (e.g., Lupton and McKee 2020) or social influence (Connors 2020).

Note that, like many of my hypotheses, these potential moderators are not mutually exclusive—it is possible that the differential effects are shaped by party-congruent value endorsements, reactions to party loyalty and betrayal, *and* ideology.

Analysis and Results. To explore these possibilities, I use three additional measures from the experiment: party-congruent value endorsements, affective polarization, and party-congruent ideological extremity. To see if the main treatment effect (in-party×trespass) is shaped by these variables (i.e., if one’s responses to these questions influence their asymmetric rewards and punishments), I interact them each separately with the main treatment effect, predicting favorability by the three triple interaction terms and controlling for partisanship (dummy), partisan strength, ideology (dummy), political interest, age, gender, education, and ethnicity (see Appendix E for coding; see Kam and Trussler 2017 for discussion of controls in experiments).⁹

First, though, I suggest some caution in interpreting results. To avoid priming participants or informing them about the intent of the experiment, the first two variables were asked post-treatment and dependent variable questions (see Klar, Leeper, and Robison 2019). While this was necessary for the experiment, it is not ideal for this analysis given post-treatment bias concerns. I thus test if treatments shaped responses to value endorsements and affective polarization questions (see Appendix E), but after finding that this is not the case, believe that using these variables can give us some useful insights. The second note of caution regards statistical power. With the full

⁹ 16 respondents did not answer questions about affective polarization and/or value endorsements and were thus dropped from this analysis. 52 respondents did not answer questions about age or interest—I imputed these responses using multiple imputation for this analysis.

model sample of 982, three triple interactions, and control variables, interpretations of these results must be cautious.

I first examine if the differential effects are driven by respondents' party-congruent value endorsements. If this were the case, we should see that those who endorse their party's values the most are also the most likely to asymmetrically reward and punish the candidates. I measure party-congruent value endorsement by asking those in the equality condition their endorsement of equality and those in the self-reliance condition their endorsement of self-reliance (respondents were given 4 ordered response options; see Appendix E). Party-congruent value endorsement was thus measured on an 8-point scale—from most party-*conflicting* to most party-*congruent* value endorsements—and recoded to 0-1 for coefficient comparability.¹⁰

I then use this variable in the first set of the previously described interactions, with the idea that if respondents' party-congruent value endorsements are driving the differential effects, then the differential effects should be dependent on these endorsements. This interaction is indeed large and significant ($\alpha=-1.20$, $p<.001$; see Appendix E for full model). To illustrate this and the other two triple interactions, Figure 2, below, shows the predicted candidate favorability based on this model, demonstrating favorability in each treatment condition by level of party-congruent value endorsements (left). This figure shows that the differential ratings from the main analysis are most pronounced amongst those who endorse their party's values the most—and actually switch amongst those who are the most party-*incongruent* with their value endorsements.

¹⁰ The value endorsement questions had 4 response options, but integrating whether endorsement was party-congruent or conflicting leads to 8 values—where 8 represents a partisan endorsing a party-congruent value to the greatest extent and 1 represents a partisan endorsing a party-*conflicting* value to the greatest extent.

Figure 2. Predicted Candidate Favorability by Treatments and Moderators

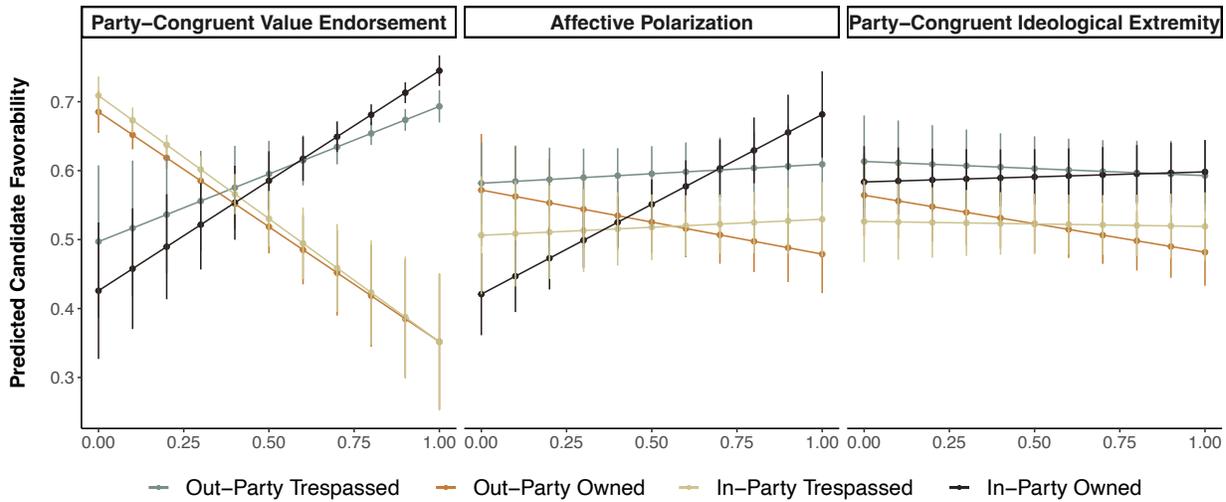


Figure shows predicted candidate favorability (0-1) by treatments and levels of party-congruent value endorsements (left), affective polarization (middle), and party-congruent ideological extremity (right) based on regression model in Appendix E with three triple interactions and controls (N=982). 95% confidence intervals reported. Figure shows that the differential ratings from Table 1 and Figure 1 are most pronounced amongst those who endorse their party's values the most ($p < .001$) and who are the most affectively polarized ($p = .001$).

I next examine if the differential effects are also driven by feelings of party loyalty or betrayal. If this were the case, we should see that those who are more affectively polarized are *also* more likely to asymmetrically punish political value trespassing because they should care more about in-party loyalty and out-party betrayal. I measure affective polarization with two feeling thermometers that gave respondents a scale for the Republican and Democratic parties (see Appendix E). Affective polarization was then measured by subtracting out-party feelings from in-party feelings (see Iyengar et al. 2019). I use this variable (200-point scale, recoded to 0-1 for coefficient comparability) in the second set of triple interactions, with the idea that if respondents' levels of affective polarization are driving the differential effects, the differential effects should then be dependent on affective polarization levels. This interaction is *also* significant ($\alpha = -0.36$, $p = .001$). Like with the previous interaction, Figure 2 demonstrates that the differential ratings are most pronounced amongst the most affectively polarized.

Next I examine the alternative explanation—that the candidates’ value rhetoric is also signaling underlying ideology, which is then driving the differential effects. Again, if this were the case, the differential effects should depend on one’s ideological extremity when that extremity is party-aligned (i.e., Democratic liberals and Republican conservatives). I measure party-congruent ideological extremity with the often-used 7-point scale (see Appendix E) and then recode this from most conflicting ideological extremity to most *consistent* ideological extremity (recoded to 0-1 for coefficient comparability). I then use this variable in the third set of triple interactions, with the idea that if the differential effects are demonstrating respondents’ judgments to the candidates’ perceived ideology, then respondents’ party-congruent ideological extremity should moderate the differential effects. This interaction is not significant ($\alpha=-0.08, p=.208$; see Figure 2).¹¹

I then compare the strength of the two significant moderators with a Wald test of the triple interaction coefficients. This test demonstrates that—while both influence the differential effect—party-congruent value endorsements are more influential than affective polarization is ($p=.000$). The data here thus demonstrate that the low party-congruent value endorsers and low affectively polarized partisans follow Voelkel and Feinberg’s (2018) findings on moral values, rating in-party politicians who value trespass *higher* than those who endorse owned values—the opposite of what I find overall (with political values), but especially among high party-congruent value endorsers and highly affectively polarized partisans. Overall, then, this suggests the *type* of partisan who

¹¹ This interaction *is* significant when run without the other two interactions but with the same controls ($\alpha=-1.82, p=.000$), suggesting multicollinearity. Nonetheless, even if standard errors are inflated due to multicollinearity, this interaction’s coefficient is rather small—especially in comparison to the other two. Either way, I urge caution in interpreting this null result.

asymmetrically rewards and punishes value trespassers: those who are committed to their party in both their value endorsements and their affection (disdain) for the in-party (out-party).

Replication. I then rely on another set of experimental data in January of 2019, also with a sample of US adults from Dynata (N=839; see Appendix F for sample information). This experiment had one extra variation, the purposes of which are beyond the scope of this manuscript. Thus, for my purposes, the experiment had the same setup.¹² Just like in the original experiment, participants were told about a Democratic or Republican candidate running for Congress whose slogan endorsed equality or self-reliance. They were then asked the same 7 favorability questions from the original experiment, which I recoded and merged in the same way as the original experiment to create a favorability scale from 0 to 1, from lower to higher favorability (Cronbach's alpha = .80; see Appendix F for factor analysis; mean: 0.65, standard deviation: 0.14).

Here I find almost the exact same results from the original experiment. Just like in the original experiment, grouping in-party and out-party politicians, there is no difference between ratings of politicians who use their own values and those who value trespass (.66 versus .64, $p=.108$ —not supporting Hypothesis 1, the “Expectancy Violations Hypothesis”). Similarly, while on average in-party politicians are rated more highly than out-party politicians (.67 versus .64, $p=.002$), breaking down by the value used, the out-party politician who value trespasses is rated more highly than the in-party politician who value trespasses (.66 versus .62, $p<.001$)—giving evidence *against* Hypothesis 2 (the “Polarization Hypothesis”), in that there is a scenario in which the out-party politician is rated more highly than the in-party politician.

¹² Because this variation (an added cue) did not significantly change the means of the conditions, I group those without and those with the cue into the same condition. Full survey in Appendix F.

Further, like in the original experiment, while in-party candidates are rated more highly when endorsing their party's owned value than when value trespassing (.71 versus .62, $p < .001$), the out-party candidate is rated more highly when breaking with their party's owned value than when endorsing it (.66 versus .61, $p < .001$ —supporting Hypothesis 3, the “Differential Effects Hypothesis”). Running the same robustness checks as in the original experiment does not change the results (see Appendix F).

Lastly, although value endorsements were not measured in this study, both ideology and affective polarization were. I use these as potential moderating variables, just as I did in the main experiment, predicting favorability by two triple interactions (In-Party×Trespass×Affective Polarization and In-Party×Trespass×Ideological Extremity) and the same controls (see Appendix F for coding).¹³ This model reproduces the previous findings, albeit with the same cautions as before: the interaction with affective polarization is significant ($\alpha = -0.37$, $p = .001$), but with party-congruent ideological extremity is not ($\alpha = -0.082$, $p = .358$). Thus, these findings replicate the original experiment, again finding strong support for the Differential Effects Hypothesis as well as evidence that this is partly motivated by affective polarization.

¹³ 40 respondents did not answer questions about ideology or affective polarization and were dropped from this analysis. 2 respondents did not answer questions about age—I imputed these responses using multiple imputation for this analysis.

Discussion & Conclusion

This piece aimed to examine the effectiveness of political value rhetoric using party-owned political values. Using a survey experiment (and replication), I tested three non-mutually exclusive hypotheses regarding candidates trespassing on the opposing party's values. In doing so, I found that in-party politicians are rewarded for using their party's values and punished for using the opposing party's values, but that out-party politicians are treated the opposite way: they are punished for using their party's values and rewarded for using the opposing party's values. Then, using additional measures within the survey experiment, I examined what drives this differential effect. I found that these asymmetric rewards and punishments seem to be driven by both party-congruent value endorsers *and* the affectively polarized. These findings suggest just how important partisanship is in how people react to value rhetoric.

These results diverge from some past findings on issue trespassing, whereby individuals are either too inattentive to react (Norpoth and Buchanan 1992) or react negatively to trespassing by both in-party and out-party candidates (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). This divergence in findings could be due to two things: increases in polarization (Iyengar et al. 2019)—which then drive differential reactions to value trespassing—and/or differences between issues and political values—whereby people, on average, know and/or care more about political values than they do issues and thus react more to trespassing. The interaction analysis suggests that both of these could be the culprit.

Note, though, that party-congruent value endorsements are not only shaped by what partisans value (e.g., Lupton and McKee 2020) but also by what partisans think they *should* value (see Connors 2020). What my findings show, then, is that individuals' responses to these value

questions—in particular, how congruent they are to their partisanship, whether because of deeply-held beliefs or social influence—predict punishing in-party candidates, but rewarding out-party candidates, for value trespassing. It is unclear, however, if these differential effects are driven by those who deeply believe in these values or by those who merely report doing so. I leave this for future research. What *is* clear is that there is a segment of partisans who report little to no value endorsement and are then less reactive to politicians’ value rhetoric. These may be the partisans who shift their values in response to party cues (Goren et al. 2009).

My findings also suggest something more nuanced about affective polarization and negative partisanship. Recall that one of the hypotheses was that partisans will always rate the in-party candidate higher than the out-party candidate. This was not the case—in fact, I found that among those who value trespassed, out-party politicians were rated *more* highly than in-party politicians (.67 versus .65, $p=.036$ [main study] and .66 versus .62, $p<.001$ [replication]). Thus, politicians may have a way to be rewarded by out-partisans—by breaking with their party (see also Kane 2019a, 2019b)—suggesting that negative out-party evaluations are more about the party itself than about specific actors within the party. Out-party actors *can*, in fact, be perceived as more likeable—even in our extremely polarized environment—implying, in contrast to what we might think given research on polarization, that what out-party politicians do *can* matter.

Thus, one might wonder: *should* politicians trespass on the opposing party’s political values? Yet, although politicians are indeed rewarded by out-partisans for value trespassing, this gain among the out-party is making up for a somewhat equal loss among the in-party. Indeed, if we look at overall rating, politicians are rated the same for using their own values as they are when using the opposing party’s values (.66 versus .66 $p=.533$ [main study] and .66 versus .64, $p=.108$ [replication]). This average, of course, masks the heterogeneity by whether the message recipients

are in-partisans or out-partisans. Given the low likelihood of party switching (i.e., a Democrat [Republican] voting for a Republican [Democrat]), politicians should care more about pleasing their base than about pleasing out-partisans—my results show that political value trespassing does only the latter and thus would not be recommended. There is thus no safe way for politicians to broaden their appeal using political values. A politician speaking to in-partisans should use their own party's values and a politician speaking to out-partisans should value trespass, but a politician speaking to a mixed crowd may be better off avoiding political values altogether.

There are some limitations to these studies, however. First, not all political values were studied in the survey experiment. It is thus possible that the effects found would not replicate for other political values—that, for example, political values that are less politicized (such as social order) might not elicit such disproportionate responses. Or, similarly, that political values more focused on social issues (e.g., moral tolerance versus traditionalism) rather than the more economic values used here (equality and self-reliance) would lead to different results. Second, these studies deal with *explicitly* referenced values, but often values are referenced implicitly—both in rhetoric and in how one conducts their life. It is unclear if implicitly referenced values would find the same trends. Third, it is also unclear how respondents' ratings would translate to political behavior—although the significant gaps in ratings within the context of a brief survey (some around 10% of the scale) suggest these effects would meaningfully shift behavior. And lastly, there are possibly differences in responses to political value rhetoric based on candidate traits—for example their gender (Bauer 2019; Herrnson et al. 2003), their race (Ciuk 2017), and how much political power they have, among others. These are certainly important questions that I leave for future research.

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