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The Dual Nature of Identity Fusion: A Unifying Force or a Source of Division?

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The Dual Nature of Identity Fusion: A Unifying Force or a Source of Division?

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin
August, 2023

Abstract

The Dual Nature of Identity Fusion: A Unifying Force or a Source of Division?

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2023

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Identity plays a key role in determining what matters to people and what they are willing to fight for. Identity fusion, an extreme form of identification where one's personal self is unified with an abstraction (a group, cause, or other individual), predicts extreme behaviors in defense of the target of fusion. In the face of a perceived threat to one's fused group, fused individuals often react harshly against the source of the threat, such as by endorsing violence against outgroups. However, identity fusion does not *necessitate* hostility toward outgroups. Indeed, some work suggests that in the absence of threat, fused individuals can be benign towards outgroup members. The demarcation between when fusion might have prosocial outcomes for the larger society as opposed to antisocial outcomes against perceived outgroup members is in need of further exploration, especially in the highly divided modern American political landscape. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to further investigate the nature of identity fusion and when fusion might have a unifying influence as opposed to a divisive one.

Across four lines of research, the current work examined (1) whether identity fusion is a more potent predictor of extreme behaviors in the political sphere than rival constructs such as moral convictions or sacred values (Chapter 2), (2) whether fusion with a partisan identity such as a political party *positively* predicts extreme behaviors that could potentially increase the power of the partisan group, but may be detrimental to the larger society (Chapters 3-5), and (3) whether fusion with a superordinate group such as one's nation or even all of humanity *negatively* predicts behaviors that may harm the larger society, even if such behaviors might myopically benefit one's political party. Findings from Chapter 2 provide evidence that identity fusion is the strongest predictor of extreme behavior on behalf of a political cause. Findings from Chapters 3-5 show that fusion with a political party or candidate *positively* predicts support for authoritarian actions against the opposing party, while fusion with the US *negatively* predicts the same authoritarianism. In Chapter 5, writing about a patriotic memory increased fusion with the US among Republicans, and fusion with the US marginally interacted with the patriotic prime manipulation to predict decreased support for authoritarianism among both Republicans and Democrats. Taken together, these findings shed valuable insight into the dual nature of identity fusion as both a unifying force and a source of division.

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CHAPTER 1: INTEGRATIVE INTRODUCTION

Identity is the compass with which we chart our bearing through the world. Identity provides us with numerous essential benefits and fulfills many core psychological needs. Our identities play an important role in determining how our personalities develop, our ability to deal with life's stresses, and how we interact with other people (Corradi, 2011). It would not be too much of a stretch to say that we are what we identify with.

However, each individual's identity is multifaceted. As Walt Whitman famously said, "I am large, I contain multitudes" (Whitman, 1855). There are limitless things to identify with, from individual idiosyncrasies such as personality traits or cognitive styles to more expansive identification with other individuals, groups, or even abstractions like collective causes or ideologies.

Yet for all its diversity and the myriad of benefits that it gives us, there is a dark side to identity. Much as a fire can provide warmth and illuminate darkness yet also can be a destructive force when mishandled, individual or group identity can motivate almost any form of human behavior. At its most positive, identity can be the fuel for pure altruism, the catalyst for prosocial behavior to serve others without selfish motive. However, at its most negative, identity can lead to manipulation, cruelty, or even wanton destruction. In the current work, I focus on a very powerful form of identification: identity fusion.

IDENTITY FUSION: A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF BOTH SOCIAL CONNECTION AND SOCIAL DIVISION

Identity fusion is a deep, visceral sense of alignment with a group, cause, or person (Swann et al., 2009; 2012). Identity fusion has three key components: an agentic personal self, relational ties to other group members, and collective ties with the target of

fusion. The incorporation of these three distinct motivators of pro-group behavior (i.e., the personal self, relational and collective ties) theoretically explains why measures of identity fusion are exceptionally strong predictors of *extreme* pro-group behavior. Identity fusion has been shown to be a strong predictor of endorsement of fighting and dying for ingroup members (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009), donating personal funds to needy ingroup members (Swann et al., 2010), and choosing self-sacrifice to save imperiled ingroup members in variations of the trolley dilemma (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2010). Identity fusion is so powerful that it compels people to enact pro-group behaviors even when it is personally costly to do so (e.g., sacrificing one's life for the group; Swann et al., 2010).

As beneficial as identity fusion may be for the group that one is fused with, fusion may also imperil people who are not part of the fused group. Although some evidence suggests that fused individuals may sometimes act benignly toward outgroup members (Vázquez et al., under review), when strongly fused individuals perceive the outgroup as threatening to their fused ingroup they are inclined to react in extreme and sometimes violent ways. For example, in a study of Israelis before and during the 2015 stabbing intifada, the threat introduced by the intifada bolstered the relationship between fusion with Judaism and endorsement of retaliation against Palestinians (Fredman et al., 2017). Similarly, perception of outgroup threat amplified the influence of fusion with a Brazilian soccer team on fan violence (Newson et al., 2018). Finally, fusion with Donald Trump was associated with support for extreme fascism against Democrats (Martel et al., in preparation).

Fear-induced strife against members of the opposing party is not inevitable, however. Common ingroup identity theory (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) proposed that when a common identity is made salient, competing groups will look beyond their differences. This process, dubbed "recategorization", has been shown to foster more favorable attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups (Gaertner et al., 2016). The need for such a unifying superordinate identity is very strong in the current American political climate.

PARTISAN DIVISION IN THE UNITED STATES

American civil society is crumbling. The ties that once bound people together have worn thin, as a greater percentage of Americans are reporting less endorsement of values that were once widely shared among citizens of the nation. A recent Wall Street Journal poll found that between 1998 and 2023 the percentage of Americans who consider various shared values to be important dropped in a number of areas, including a drop in the importance of patriotism from 70 to 38 percent, a drop in religious importance from 62 to 39 percent, a drop in the importance of community involvement from 47 to 27 percent, and a drop in the importance of having children from 59 to 30 percent (Zitner, 2023).

Beyond the decline in shared American values, there has also been a sharp decline in trust between supporters of the two major American political parties. For example, a recent poll found that the majority of both Republicans and Democrats believe that few or even no good ideas come from the other party (Pew, 2019). Unfortunately for civil society, the problem of partisan division runs even deeper than policy. Members of the rival political parties no longer agree on 'basic facts' (Pew, 2019) and are increasingly reluctant to date or marry across party lines (Iyengar et al., 2019). This extreme partisan division has

been labeled by researchers as political sectarianism, and is defined by the tendency to adopt a moralized identification with one political group against another (Finkel et al., 2020).

This divisive political environment is rich soil for modern American politicians, who by their nature are divisive creatures. Politicians often prey on partisan division and use it as a tool to increase their personal power. With little truly meaningful change to offer American citizens due to the shackles of their corporate masters who fund their campaigns and get them elected, politicians increasingly rely on divisive rhetoric that vilifies "the other" and conspiracy claims that bad actors on the other side politically are hatching nefarious schemes.

The details behind the supposed threats from the opposing party trumpeted by politicians are often vague, such as in August of 2020 when then-president Donald Trump claimed that mysterious thugs dressed in black were boarding planes to Washington D.C. with plans to disrupt the Republican National Convention (PolitiFact, 2020). Although no evidence ever emerged to substantiate Trump's claims, it was parroted by other politicians on Trump's side like Rand Paul, who told Fox News that he believed protestors who confronted him outside of the Republican National Convention "were paid to come here, are not from Washington, D.C., and are sort of paid to be anarchists" (Shabad, 2020).

Beyond just creating a vague sense of amorphous threat from shadowy figures, Trump and other politicians have no qualms about directly linking the supposed bad actors directly to their Democratic political rivals. An example of this comes from late Summer of 2020 when Trump claimed that Joe Biden was being controlled by a group of people from "the dark shadows" (Shabad, 2020). Why Trump made so many comments about threatening shadowy figures and their ties to the Democratic Party during the Summer of 2020 is something that only Trump himself knows, but one could speculate that in the face

of his declining support leading up to the 2020 presidential election Trump chose to foster a sense of menace around the Democratic Party and their supporters to paint himself and the Republican Party as the only defense against the evil designs of the Democrats.

The narrative that political dissenters are actually disingenuous puppets paid or controlled by shadowy figures who want to damage American society is truly a pernicious one. Such a view corrodes the very foundations of civil society, since it encourages people to assume the very worst of those who disagree with them. The open exchange of ideas and the possibility of being persuaded out of bad ideas by exposure to good ones is essential to any government that elects officials to rule on behalf of the people. The survival of modern democracies depends on being able to have tough conversations with those who disagree with you and through that, to try to come to some common ground compromise that can be enacted by government policy. If people believe that those who disagree with them are not well-meaning individuals acting in good faith to promote what they truly believe to be a better version of the United States, but instead are morally bankrupt individuals who are actively trying to harm our country, then our country is doomed. When you cannot work with those you disagree with, then the only option left is to control them through force. It is no wonder then, that there has been a rise in support for authoritarianism lately.

RISE IN SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIANISM

Authoritarianism can be defined as a political system which rejects political plurality and uses strong central power to preserve the political status quo, while also limiting the rule of law, separation of powers, democratic voting, and individual rights (Cerutti, 2017). Support for authoritarianism is on the rise throughout the world (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022), while support for democracy is declining (Foa & Mounk, 2016).

However, the decline in support for democracy in the United States has been particularly precipitous. That is, whereas 75% of Americans born in the 1930s considered democracy to be essential, only 30% of Americans born in the 1980s considered it essential (Foa & Mounk, 2016). Although a decline in support for democracy does not necessary lead to an increase in support for authoritarianism, this does seem to be occurring in the contemporary United States, particularly among the Political Right-Wing.

Much of the endorsement of right-wing authoritarianism was colorfully illustrated by Republican former president Donald Trump. As president, Donald Trump frequently expressed hostility toward outgroup members in extreme ways, such as when he retweeted the quote, "the only good Democrat is a dead Democrat" (Folley, 2020). Trump also frequently and explicitly called for authoritarian actions against those who disagreed with him, and went as far as to enact such behaviors such as when he ordered a harsh crackdown on progressive protesters in Portland during the Summer of 2020 (BBC, 2020) and when he oversaw the use of tear gas to remove mostly peaceful protesters from a location near the White House (Bender & Gurman, 2020).

Were the endorsement of authoritarianism to be limited to only Donald Trump, the situation might not be so dire, as Trump no longer holds the reins of political power. Unfortunately, the authoritarianism that Trump espoused also seems to be mirrored by his supporters, many of whom are sympathetic to authoritarian messages and denigrations of outgroups. Indeed, numerous lines of empirical evidence support this. For example, Trump supporters scored higher in authoritarian aggression and group-based dominance than supporters of other 2016 presidential candidates (Womick et al., 2019). In addition, outgroup hostility was a stronger predictor of voting for Trump than economic insecurity, education level, and other variables (Fording & Schram, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018; Smith & Hanley, 2018). Finally, Trump supporters' self-reports suggested they are drawn to

aggressive, intolerant leaders who promised to restore the "rightful" societal order that placed white males at the top (Smith & Hanley, 2018).

The rise in authoritarianism among the Right-Wing has truly dangerous consequences for American society, as best exemplified by the events of January 6, 2021 when Trump's supporters attempted to stop Congress from affirming Trump's defeat in the presidential election. Such extreme authoritarian behavior on behalf of Trump supporters might seem unjustifiable, yet for those who believe that the opposing political party is evil and must be stopped at all costs, the ends may justify the means. With this context in mind, it becomes clear that partisan identity is an insidious force that threatens the very foundations of American society. Yet a different form of identity may provide the cure to the poison that partisanship presents.

IDENTITY AS THE ANTIDOTE TO AUTHORITARIANISM

What Americans need is a shared national identity, one that embraces the diversity of viewpoints and diversity of people that make up this nation. As identity can be a source of division or unity and extreme identity can lead to extreme behaviors, constructive or destructive, a strongly held and viscerally felt national identity might be invaluable for mending the frayed ties that bind the United States together. Identity fusion, with its emphasis on both ideological collective ties as well as family-like relational ties, might serve as the identity raft that Americans adrift in the sea of partisan division can cling to.

The familial relational ties of a fused identity are particularly important in the current political climate. Americans need to restore their trust in each other. They need to be able to give the benefit of the doubt to political rivals and trust that people on the other side may disagree with them, but they do so in good faith. This charitable belief in the

goodness of the other, that despite any flaws a person might have, they still mean well, is a hallmark of how people feel toward their families. People may not like all of the members of their family all the time, but they at least tolerate them to keep harmony within the family unit. Therefore, the focus of the current research is to identify and leverage an inclusive group identity that connects Americans to each other, with the hope that such an identity might help to reduce partisan division in the United States.

THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The current research aimed to address the need to understand how to leverage identity to offset the current partisan division within the United States. Although I had hypotheses that were idiosyncratic to the work contained within each individual chapter that are presented in their respective sections, I also had some overarching hypotheses that connect the chapters.

First, I predicted that identity, specifically identity fusion, would be a more potent predictor of extreme behaviors in the political sphere than rival constructs such as moral convictions or sacred values. This hypothesis is addressed primarily in Chapter 2, but it has important implications for the rest of the work. Given that this hypothesis was supported and identity fusion emerged as a better predictor of extreme behavior than other established predictors, this suggests that the most potent route to reducing partisan division is an identity-based approach.

My second hypothesis, addressed in Chapters 3-5, was based on the idea that the target of identity fusion is important for determining which extreme behaviors individuals might endorse and which behaviors they might not. It was my belief that fusion should not indiscriminately predict extreme behaviors, but rather fusion should predict behaviors that

directly benefit the fused group. Here, the inclusivity of the group should matter greatly, as fusion with smaller groups excludes more people and is therefore conducive to actions that myopically benefit the group but may be detrimental to the larger society that contains the group. Specifically, my second hypothesis was that fusion with a partisan identity such as a political party or candidate would be positively predictive of extreme behaviors that can potentially increase the power of the partisan group, but may be detrimental to the larger society, namely support for authoritarian actions against the rival political party.

Finally, my third hypothesis, also addressed in Chapters 3-5, was that fusion with a superordinate group such as one's nation or even all of humanity should negatively predict behaviors that may harm the larger society, even if such behaviors might benefit one's political party. Specifically, I predicted that fusion with the US would negatively predict support for authoritarian actions against the rival political party.

Taken together, the current work presents valuable insights into the dual nature of identity fusion as both a unifying force and a source of division. The findings of each chapter add to our understanding of the role of identity fusion in the political sphere as a double-edged sword that can serve as either a positive or negative predictor of partisan division and authoritarian intergroup hostility.

CHAPTER 2: WHY TRUE BELIEVERS MAKE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE: SACRED VALUES, MORAL CONVICTIONS, OR IDENTITY FUSION?

"The true believer is everywhere on the march, and both by converting and antagonizing he is shaping the world in his own image. And whether we are to line up with him or against him, it is well that we should know all we can concerning his nature and potentialities."

Eric Hoffer, 1951

Although Hoffer wrote over a half century ago, the "nature and potentialities" of true believers are still dimly understood.[1] For example, the reasons why true believers enact extreme behaviors for their favored causes remain mysterious. Fortunately, three relatively new variables – sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion – may help illuminate the processes that motivate true believers. In this report, we ask which of these variables – either alone or in combination with each other – best predicts endorsement of fighting and dying for a cause. We chose these variables because we suspected that they may share a common element – the personal self – which might moderate the impact of each of these variables on endorsement of extreme behavior. We begin with a brief description of each of these variables.

SACRED VALUES, MORAL CONVICTIONS, AND IDENTITY FUSION AS PREDICTORS OF EXTREME BEHAVIOR

Tetlock et al. (1996) and Tetlock (2003) introduced the sacred value construct to explain what happens when there is a clash between an individual's religious and economic imperatives. They proposed that when the moral community deems a value sacred, members of the community are

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[1] This chapter was published as a peer-reviewed article written by the current author (first author) and William Swann (last author) and others. All authors contributed to the study design. The first author prepared the study materials and collected the data. Data analysis and interpretation was performed by the first author under the direction of the last author. An initial version of the manuscript was drafted by the first author and reviewed and revised by the last author. All authors completed revisions in response to peer review and approved the final manuscript for submission. Citation: Martel, F.A., Buhrmester, M., Gómez, A, Vázquez, A. & Swann, W.B. Jr. (2021). Why True Believers Make the Ultimate Sacrifice: Sacred Values, Moral Convictions, or Identity Fusion?. Frontiers in Psychology. 12. 779120. 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.779120.

expected to strenuously resist the use of economic incentives to persuade them to abandon the value. Later authors (Atran & Ginges, 2015) removed the religious component from sacred values, contending that "although the term 'sacred values' intuitively denotes religious belief, ... we use the term to refer to any preferences regarding objects, beliefs, or practices that people treat as both incompatible or nonfungible with profane issues or economic goods."

The defining characteristic of sacred values is absolute and unequivocal adherence to the value. In fact, non-negotiability is so central to the sacred values construct that some investigators (e.g., Gómez et al., 2017; Sheikh et al., 2016; Vázquez et al., 2020) measure the construct using a single-item assessment of non-negotiability (operationalized as refusal to compromise a value in exchange for material benefits). Consistent with expectation, research has indicated that those who claim that a value is non-negotiable are more inclined to endorse extreme behaviors to defend that value, including even sacrificing their life, letting their family suffer, killing civilians, undertaking a suicide attack, and torturing women and children (Atran & Ginges, 2015; Gómez et al., 2017).

Moral convictions could also motivate true believers to make extreme sacrifices. These convictions are feelings regarding what is right and wrong that constitute core aspects of the personal self (Skitka et al., 2005, 2021). Moral convictions theoretically foster a principled obligation to act that, in turn, predicts intentions to enact actions that advance the cause (Sabucedo et al., 2018). Like sacred values, moral convictions are perceived to be objectively true and universally applicable (Skitka, 2014) and are associated with an unwillingness to compromise even in the face of competing desires or concerns (Skitka, 2014). For example, whereas a strong anti-abortion belief might rule out abortion under *most* circumstances, a moral conviction against abortion will rule out abortion under all circumstances – even if, for example, it is certain that both the mother and fetus will die during childbirth.

Yet, moral convictions are distinct from sacred values in at least one respect. Whereas sacred values are theoretically dictated by the moral community, moral convictions are understood to be independent of establishment, convention, rules, or authorities (Skitka et al., 2008). As such, normative and majority considerations should have relatively little influence on moral convictions

or associated obligations to act. For example, Americans who held a moral conviction against torture resisted a majority norm that supported the torture of suspected terrorists (Aramovich et al., 2012).

Identity fusion is a third variable that may motivate the extreme actions of true believers. Identity fusion occurs when an abstraction (a group, cause, or even another person) comes to define the self. When people become fused to a target group or cause, the boundaries between the self and the target become porous and the personal self becomes one with the target. This union creates a sense of equivalence of the self and the target that makes defending the target equivalent to defending the self (Swann et al., 2009, 2012). As a result, strongly fused persons are especially prone to enact pro-group or pro-cause behaviors when under threat from perceived adversaries (Fredman et al., 2017; Swann et al., 2014). The bulk of past research on identity fusion has emphasized the antecedents and consequences of identity fusion with groups (see, for example, Gómez et al., 2020; Jong et al., 2015; Swann & Buhrmester, 2015). Nevertheless, there is now work demonstrating the consequences of being fused with various causes, including religion (Fredman et al., 2017), political party (Ashokkumar et al., 2019; Buhrmester et al., 2012; Talaifar & Swann, 2019), gun and abortion rights (Ashokkumar et al., 2020), and even politicians, such as Donald Trump (e.g., Kunst et al., 2019; Martel et al., in preparation).

Although sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion have garnered considerable attention, efforts to integrate them have been limited. One reason for this may be that researchers have been mindful of important distinctions between these approaches. For example, whereas the sacred values and moral conviction formulations explicitly include a moral component, the identity fusion formulation includes no explicit moral component. Nevertheless, the identity fusion formulation may accommodate moral considerations because such considerations represent an aspect of the personal self for most people. For this reason, aligning the personal self with a target of fusion is tantamount to imbuing the target with moral overtones. From this vantage point, the identity fusion formulation is a broader construct that can readily accommodate material as well as moral beliefs (e.g., Carnes and Lickel, 2018; Chinchilla et al., 2021).

Methodological factors have also hampered efforts to assess the relationship between the three potential predictors of extreme behaviors of true believers. For example, the use of single-item measures of fusion and sacred values (Atran & Ginges, 2015) has precluded factor analytic assessments of the relationship between the two variables. In addition, past researchers have typically focused on one cause and sampled participants from one country. To address these limitations, in our research, we (a) used multi-item measures of each predictor, (b) tethered measures of the three potential predictors to either of two specific causes (abortion or gun rights), and (c) sampled participants from two countries (United States and Spain). The outcome measure was endorsement of fighting and dying for the cause under scrutiny. This allowed us to systematically assess the relationship between the predictors and compare the capacity of each to predict willingness to fight and die for a cause both alone and in interaction with one another.

IS THERE A COMMON MECHANISM UNDERLYING THE EFFECTS OF SACRED VALUES, MORAL CONVICTIONS, AND IDENTITY FUSION?

Our research also asked why true believers care so deeply about sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion. Our search for answers to this question prompted us to consult theory and research on attitudes and behavior. This literature indicates that people appear to care most about beliefs that are highly important and central to the personal self (e.g., Petty & Krosnick, 1995). Hence, true believers may simply regard sacred values, moral convictions, and targets of fusion as particularly relevant to their personal selves. We tested this possibility in our research using a series of four manipulations, each designed to increase the salience of the personal self in a unique way. We reasoned that insofar as the personal self underlies the impact of a given predictor variable (i.e., sacred values, moral convictions, or identity fusion) on willingness to self-sacrifice for a cause, increasing the salience of the personal self would strengthen the relationship between that predictor variable and willingness to fight and die for the cause.

To select manipulations to increase the salience of the personal self, we drew upon the social psychological literature on self and identity. This literature pointed to two distinct

approaches for increasing the salience of the personal self. The most common approach involves encouraging participants to affirm some aspect of the personal self. We considered three such self-affirmation manipulations. First, participants completed a series of 5 sentences, each of which began with "I am a" by responding with the first things that came to mind (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). Second, participants imagined the most personal goals and dreams they have hoped to accomplish before their death as well as the legacy they hoped to leave behind (*cf.* Klackl & Jonas, 2019). Third, participants wrote about what makes them unique (Silvia & Eichstaedt, 2004), that is, "What makes you, 'you?'"

As an alternative to the three self-affirmation manipulations, in our final study, we employed self-*dis*confirming feedback. The rationale underlying this manipulation comes from self- verification theory (Swann, 1983). Specifically, when people receive feedback from others that threatens aspects of their personal self, they may systematically work to refute the disconfirming feedback (e.g., Swann & Hill, 1982). Researchers have shown that self-disconfirming feedback increases the relation between identity fusion and endorsement of extreme behavior (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009).

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

As noted above, our studies focused on two different causes. Study cluster I (#1–3) focused on gun rights, and study cluster II (#4–6) focused on abortion rights. Also, the first study within each cluster (i.e., #1 and #4) included no manipulation of the personal self, which is to say only four of the six studies included such a manipulation (Studies #2–3, #5–6). Finally, Studies #1–5 recruited American participants through the Prolific crowdsourcing platform; Study 6 used a snowball technique facilitated by introductory psychology students from Spain.

We addressed four primary questions. First, what was the relationship of the three predictors to one another? Second, to what degree were each of the three predictors uniquely related to endorsement of extreme behavior? Third, were the predictors stronger when predicting the outcome variable on their own or in interaction with each other? Finally, with respect to the

studies that had experimental manipulations (# 2, 3, 5, 6), did the manipulation interact with any of the three predictors in predicting endorsement of extreme behavior? We address each of these four questions in the research that follows.

STUDY CLUSTER I: SACRED VALUES, MORAL CONVICTIONS, AND IDENTITY FUSION AS PREDICTORS OF WILLINGNESS TO SELF-SACRIFICE FOR THE GUN RIGHTS CAUSE

STUDY 1
METHOD

Participants

We recruited 311 American participants through Prolific. In this study and all subsequent studies, we excluded participants who failed attention checks, failed to complete the survey, or were outliers on the predictor or outcome variables. Outliers were identified by examining box plots of the variables and through the use of R's "boxplot.stats" function. After exclusions, 291 participants remained (130 male, 157 female, 4 other; ages 18–73; 102 pro-gun, 189 anti-gun).

Procedure

All studies reported here shared a common core procedure which included introducing the study as an investigation of participants' opinions toward a controversial contemporary issue. Participants then indicated whether they opposed or supported gun restrictions (Studies 1-3) or access to abortion (Studies 4-6). They then completed measures of the three target predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). As Study 1 and 4 had no experimental manipulation, participants completed the outcome measure (willingness to self-sacrifice for their position on the gun/abortion cause) immediately after competing measures of the three

predictors. In Studies 2-3 and 5-6, participants received the experimental manipulation prior to completing the outcome measure.

Measures of predictors and outcome

In all 6 studies participants completed, in random order, measures of the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). The outcome measure was always willingness to self-sacrifice for the cause. We describe these measures below and present the relevant descriptive statistics in Appendix A1.

Predictor 1: Sacred Values. Our primary measure of sacred values was a continuous, 4-item measure adapted from Hanselmann and Tanner (2008). Participants indicated whether their stance on the gun rights issue was open to material tradeoffs (e.g., "My position on gun control is something that I should not sacrifice, no matter what the benefits (money or something else)."; "My position on gun control is non-negotiable.") Participants indicated the degree to which they agreed with each statement on scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). In our final two studies we also assessed sacred values using a modified version of the single-item, dichotomous measure employed by Sheikh et al. (2016). Because the continuous measure was a stronger predictor than the dichotomous one, we present the results of the continuous predictor in the body of the paper and relegate the results of the dichotomous predictor to the appendices (see Appendix A5).

Predictor 2: Moral Convictions. We used the 5-item measure of moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2014; Morgan, 2011) to measure the degree to which participants' stance on the gun rights issue is related to their personal sense of morality (e.g., "To what extent do you feel your position on gun control is based on strong personal principles?"; "How much are your

feelings about your position on gun control connected to your core moral beliefs and convictions?"). All items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all)* to 5 (*extremely*).

Predictor 3: Identity Fusion. Participants completed a measure of identity fusion with their position on the gun rights cause using a modified version of Gómez et al.'s (2011) seven-item continuous fusion scale (e.g., "I am strong because of my position on gun control."; "I am one with my position on gun control."). The respondents indicated the degree to which each statement reflected their relationship with the gun rights cause on scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*).

Outcome measure: Willingness to Self-Sacrifice. We measured participants' willingness to self-sacrifice in defense of their position on the gun rights cause with the 7-item scale developed by Swann et al., (2009). The items assessed willingness to fight or even die in defense of the cause (e.g., "I would fight someone threatening my position on gun control."; "I would sacrifice my life if it advanced my position on gun control."). On scales ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*), respondents indicated the degree to which each statement reflected their willingness to self-sacrifice for the gun control cause.

After responding to the outcome measure, participants then completed attention check items and demographic questions (see Appendix A6). Finally, participants were debriefed.

RESULTS

Covariation amongst predictors

As can be seen in Table 2.1, the correlations between the three predictors were moderate to substantial in most of the six studies (breaking samples down into participants who favored or opposed a given cause did not alter our conclusions).

We also entered the three predictors into a series of factor analyses using oblimin rotation. With the exception of Study 6, the three predictors consistently loaded strongly to three unique factors (see Table 2.2 for an example). However, in Study 6, all items for the sacred values and moral convictions scales both loaded strongly on one factor, the first two identity fusion items loaded strongly on another factor, and the remaining five fusion items loaded on the final factor. The factor loadings for all six studies are presented in the appendices (Appendix A2).

Study	Sacred Values and Moral Convictions	Sacred Values and Identity Fusion	Moral Convictions and Identity Fusion
1	0.58	0.54	0.52
2	0.72	0.66	0.62
3	0.66	0.54	0.53
4	0.58	0.54	0.49
5	0.53	0.26	0.28
6	0.60	0.45	0.54

Note: For all correlations, p's < 0.001

Table 2.1:   Correlations between predictors in all chapter 2 studies

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	**0.847**	0.138	
Fusion2	**0.836**	0.142	0.164
Fusion3	**0.765**	0.274	0.259
Fusion4	**0.683**	0.267	0.297
Fusion5	**0.686**	0.228	0.114
Fusion6	**0.603**	0.156	0.233
Fusion7	**0.628**	0.229	0.332
SacredValues1	0.258	0.295	**0.652**
SacredValues2	0.175	0.301	**0.556**
SacredValues3	0.233	0.274	**0.907**
SacredValues4	0.289	0.262	**0.788**
MoralConvictions1	0.241	**0.549**	0.220
MoralConvictions2	0.190	**0.734**	0.238
MoralConvictions3	0.131	**0.744**	0.234
MoralConvictions4	0.238	**0.767**	0.238
MoralConvictions5	0.254	**0.693**	0.213

Note: Blank spaces indicate that the factor loading value was very small (below absolute value of 0.1)

Table 2.2:   Factor analyses loadings of predictors in study 1

Predictive validity of the three predictors

Analytic approach and statistical notes pertaining to all studies

To determine whether sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion interactively predicted increased willingness to self-sacrifice for a cause, in each study we tested for the 3-way interaction with a regression model that included the three-way interaction between the predictors, all two-way interactions, and all single predictors. To test for the 2-way interactions, we ran 3 unique models which contained each possible two-way interaction (fusion x sacred values, fusion x moral convictions, and sacred values x moral convictions) and the corresponding single predictors.

Next, to determine which predictor was the strongest predictor, we ran a simultaneous multiple regression model with sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion as predictors and self-sacrifice for a cause as the outcome. Finally, in the four studies which contained experimental manipulations, we ran regression models to test possible two-way interactions between each of the primary predictors with the experimental manipulation, then report any main effect of the manipulation alone. Here and hereafter, all regression models include the unstandardized beta coefficients, the unstandardized confidence intervals, the *t*-test and associated *p*-value for the given effect, and the total model adjusted R^2.

Let us add two important statistical notes. First, given the substantial correlations between the three predictors, we were concerned that multicollinearity could influence our findings. This concern was not supported. That is, in all six studies, the variance inflation factors never exceeded 2.50 (the specific values are presented in Appendix A3). Second, to determine if the three predictors were associated with the outcome measures when they were considered

individually (i.e., without controlling for each other), we also ran single-predictor regressions (i.e., sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion) in which the outcome was willingness to self-sacrifice as well as the bivariate correlations between each predictor and willingness to self-sacrifice (see Appendix A4). As shown in the appendices, sacred values and especially moral convictions were slightly more potent in single-predictor regressions than they were in the simultaneous multiple regressions. Sacred values were significant in Studies 1-4 and Study 6 (ps < 0.05); moral convictions were significant in all six studies (ps < 0.01) and identity fusion was as well (ps < 0.001).

Analyses of Study 1

We first tested for the presence of triple and two-way interactions between the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). No significant two nor three-way interactions between the three predictor variables emerged, ps > 0.148.

Subsequent inspection of the main effects (with the interactions removed) revealed that identity fusion was the strongest predictor overall. That is, both identity fusion ($B = 0.18$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.25], $t(287) = 4.94$, $p < 0.001$, total model R^2 adj = 0.19) and sacred values ($B = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.16], $t(287) = 2.27$, $p = 0.024$) emerged as significant predictors. The difference between the effect size for fusion versus sacred values was marginally significant ($z = 1.85$, $p = 0.06$). Moral convictions ($p = 0.828$) were not a significant predictor in this model.

STUDY 2

METHOD

Participants

We recruited 122 American participants through Prolific. After exclusions, 108 (47 male, 58 female, 3 other; ages 18-79; 32 pro-gun, 76 anti-gun) remained.

Procedure

Participants first completed the three predictors. Then, in the self-affirmation condition, participants received a manipulation designed to increase the salience of the personal-self. Specifically, participants responded to five statements that began "I am a…". In the control condition, the five statements began, "Fish are…". Then, on the following page, in both conditions participants were asked to write a brief explanation of the words they used to fill in the blanks. After the manipulation, participants completed the same outcome measure used in Study 1. Please see Appendix A7 for the full text of all the manipulations.

RESULTS

We first tested for the presence of triple and two-way interactions between the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). No significant two nor three-way interactions between the three predictor variables emerged, ps > 0.157.

Subsequent inspection of the main effects (with the interactions removed) revealed that identity fusion was the only significant predictor ($B = 0.37$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.53], $t(104)= 4.68$, $p < 0.001$, total model R^2 adj $= 0.28$); neither sacred values ($p = 0.391$) nor moral convictions ($p = 0.422$) were significant.

Finally, there were no significant main nor interactive effects of the experimental manipulation on willingness to self-sacrifice for the cause (ps > 0.269).

STUDY 3
METHOD

Participants

For Study 3 we recruited 121 American participants through Prolific. After exclusions, 113 participants (45 male, 68 female; ages 18-70; 39 pro-gun, 74 anti-gun) remained.

Procedure

Participants completed the measures of the three predictors. Then, in the self-affirmation condition, participants received a manipulation designed to increase the salience of the personal-self. Specifically, participants in the self-affirmation condition wrote about their goals prior to dying and the legacy they hoped to leave behind ("Please take a few minutes to write about what comes to mind when you think about your death. Please focus on (1) the most personal goals and dreams you'll have hoped to accomplish before death and (2) the legacy that you hope to leave behind. Be as specific or general as you would like."). In the control condition, participants were asked to write about fish ("Please take a few minutes to write about fish and anything that comes to mind regarding them. Be as specific or general as you would like."). After responding to one of the two prompts all participants then completed the outcome measure.

RESULTS

We first tested for the presence of triple and two-way interactions between the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). No significant two nor three-way interactions between the three predictor variables emerged, ps > 0.418.

Subsequent inspection of the main effects (with the interactions removed) revealed that identity fusion was a marginally significant predictor of the outcome measure ($B = 0.14$, 95% CI [-0.002, 0.29], $t(109)= 1.95$, $p = 0.054$, total model R^2 adj $= 0.14$) but sacred values ($p = 0.466$) and moral convictions ($p = 0.339$) were not.

There were also no interactions between the manipulation and sacred values, moral conviction, or identity fusion in Study 3 (ps > 0.549). Finally, there was no significant main effect of experimental manipulation on willingness to self-sacrifice for cause ($t(111) = 1.18$, $p = 0.242$).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM CLUSTER 1 STUDIES

Factor analytic results of our first three studies indicate that measures of sacred values, moral convictions and identity fusion load onto separate factors. Moreover, when we compared the relative utility of the three variables in predicting willingness to sacrifice for the gun-rights cause, identity fusion emerged as the strongest predictor and there was no evidence of interactions between the three predictors. Finally, attempts to experimentally increase the salience of the personal-self by affirming the personal-self failed to increase endorsement of self-sacrifice for the cause.

STUDY CLUSTER 2: SACRED VALUES, MORAL CONVICTIONS, AND IDENTITY FUSION AS PREDICTORS OF WILLINGNESS TO SELF-SACRIFICE FOR THE ABORTION RIGHTS CAUSE

Intrigued by these findings, we conducted three follow-up investigations. One goal was to determine if the findings from Study Cluster I would generalize to an unrelated cause, abortion rights, and to a new sample, Spaniards. In addition, to determine if self-confirming versus self-disconfirming manipulations would differentially influence the relationship between sacred values, moral convictions, or identity fusion and willingness to self-sacrifice, we introduced appropriate manipulations in Studies 5 and 6, respectively.

STUDY 4
METHOD

Participants

We recruited 303 American participants through Prolific, 275 of which remained after exclusions (116 male, 152 female, 7 other; ages 18-72; 56 pro-life, 219 pro-choice).

Procedure

There was no experimental manipulation; instead, participants proceeded directly to the outcome measure after completing measures of the three predictors. Finally, in all studies participants completed attention check items, demographic questions, and then were debriefed.

RESULTS

We first tested for the presence of triple and two-way interactions between the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). No significant two nor three-way interactions between the three predictor variables emerged, ps > 0.161.

Subsequent inspection of the main effects (with the interactions removed) revealed that identity fusion was the only significant predictor of willingness to self-sacrifice ($B = 0.29$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.39], $t(271) = 6.10$, $p < 0.001$, total model R^2 adj = 0.20)); sacred values ($p = 0.838$) and moral convictions ($p = 0.328$) were not significant.

STUDY 5
METHOD

Participants

We recruited 342 American participants through Prolific. After exclusions, 288 remained (152 male, 133 female, 3 other; ages 18-64; 288 pro-choice). In this study we only recruited pro-choice participants due to their greater availability and the fact that there were no apparent differences between pro-choice and pro-life participants in the foregoing study.

Procedure

Participants first completed measures of the three predictors. Then, in the self-affirmation condition, participants received a manipulation designed to increase the salience of the personal-self. Specifically, participants imagined that they were describing their inner selves to a close friend ("Please take 2 minutes to tell us about yourself. Imagine yourself with your closest friend and your friend asks you "What makes you "you"? Imagine your friend isn't interested in superficial qualities and really wants to know about your enduring, deepest self."). In the control condition, participants contemplated the existence of alien life ("Please take 2 minutes to give your opinion about whether there is intelligent life in the universe other than on Earth."). Participants then completed the outcome measure.

RESULTS

We first tested for the presence of triple and two-way interactions between the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). No significant two nor three-way interactions between the three predictor variables emerged, $ps > 0.253$.

Subsequent inspection of the main effects (with the interactions removed) revealed that identity fusion was a significant predictor ($B = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.44], $t(284) = 7.75$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2\ adj = 0.22$) and so too was moral convictions ($B = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.39], $t(284) = 3.05$, $p = 0.003$), but not sacred values ($p = 0.066$). The significant effect of moral convictions in Study 5 was an exception to the overall pattern reported in this paper, but note that even so the fusion effect was stronger than the moral convictions effect, ($z = 3.16$, $p < 0.001$).

There were no interactive effects of the manipulation and sacred values, moral conviction, or identity fusion in Study 5 ($ps > 0.491$), nor was there a main effect of the manipulation ($p = 0.624$).

STUDY 6
METHOD

In contrast to the first five studies, in this study we attempted to threaten the personal-self by presenting participants with feedback that threatened their self-views, a manipulation which has been used in previous research to effectively activate the personal-self (Gómez et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009). To enhance the plausibility of the feedback manipulation, this study was conducted in two waves. Specifically, during wave one, participants completed some questionnaires. We ostensibly showed their responses to a team of psychologist evaluators prior to wave two, thus providing a basis for the feedback manipulation.

Participants

We recruited participants using the snowball technique wherein Spanish Psychology undergraduates asked their acquaintances to participate. Participation was voluntary and uncompensated. We recruited 267 Spanish participants in the first wave; 199 participants completed both waves and 197 of these participants remained after exclusions and were included in our analyses (42 male, 155 female; ages 20-68; 19 pro-life, 178 pro-choice).

Procedure

In wave one we measured the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion) with respect to the abortion cause. One week later participants received an email inviting them to complete wave two of the study, to which they responded within 1 to 39 days. In wave two, we introduced the feedback manipulation. Participants learned that, based on their responses during wave one, they had been evaluated by a group of psychologists who had assessed how the participant perceived him/herself as well as how the participant actually is on five dimensions: shyness, insecurity, stubbornness, nervousness, and distrust. Participants in the self-disconfirming condition learned that the psychologists had concluded that, for four of the five dimensions, there was a discrepancy between participants' self-views and their actual characteristics. In contrast, participants in the verifying condition learned that the psychologists had concluded that, for four of the five dimensions, their self-views agreed with their actual characteristics. Participants in the control condition learned that due to a technical problem they would not receive any feedback from the evaluators. After the feedback manipulation, participants completed the outcome measure, willingness to self-sacrifice for the abortion cause.

RESULTS

We first tested for the presence of triple and two-way interactions between the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion). No significant two nor three-way interactions between the three predictor variables emerged, ps > 0.479.

Subsequent inspection of the main effects (with the interactions removed) revealed that identity fusion was a significant predictor ($B = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.35], $t(193)= 4.51$, $p <$ 0.001, total model $R^2\ adj = 0.12$) but the other two predictors were not, sacred values ($p =$ 0.905), moral convictions ($p = 0.879$).

We then tested whether each of the three primary predictors interacted with the experimental manipulation in three separate regression models in which we dummy coded the self-disconfirming and verifying condition against the baseline control condition. When we regressed willingness to self-sacrifice for the cause on one of the three primary predictors, the two dummy-coded variables, and the two interaction terms between the primary predictor and the dummy coded variables, a significant interaction emerged between the experimental manipulation and identity fusion. As shown in Figure 2.1, identity fusion was more strongly predictive of willingness to self-sacrifice in the self-disconfirming condition compared to the control condition ($B = 0.29$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.50], $t(191)= 2.82$, $p = 0.005$, total model $R^2\ adj = 0.19$), whereas the predictive power of identity fusion did not differ between the verifying and control conditions ($B = 0.08$, 95% CI [-0.13, 0.28], $t(191)= 0.77$, $p = 0.444$). Simple effects analyses of the results displayed in Figure 2.1 indicated that fusion with abortion was a stronger predictor of willingness to self-sacrifice for the cause in the self-disconfirming condition ($B = 0.43$, $t(191) = 5.79$, $p < 0.001$) than in the verifying condition ($B = 0.22$, $t(191) = 2.93$, $p = 0.004$) or the control condition ($B = 0.14$, $t(191) = 1.86$, $p = 0.064$).

There was also a significant interaction between moral convictions and the experimental manipulation. As shown in Figure 2.2, moral convictions were significantly more strongly predictive of willingness to self-sacrifice in the self-disconfirming condition compared to the control condition ($B = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.17, 1.07], $t(191)= 2.71$, $p = 0.007$, total model $R^2\ adj = 0.08$) whereas the predictive power of moral convictions did not differ between the verifying and control conditions ($B = 0.19$, 95% CI [-0.15, 0.54], $t(191)= 1.11$, $p = 0.270$). Simple effects analyses of the results displayed in Figure 2.2 indicated that holding moral convictions toward one's position on the abortion cause was a stronger predictor of willingness to self-sacrifice for the cause in the self-disconfirming condition ($B = 0.68$, $t(191) = 3.55$, $p < 0.001$) than in the verifying condition ($B = 0.26$, $t(191) = 2.10$, $p = 0.037$) or the control condition ($B = 0.06$, $t(191) = 0.51$, $p = 0.611$).
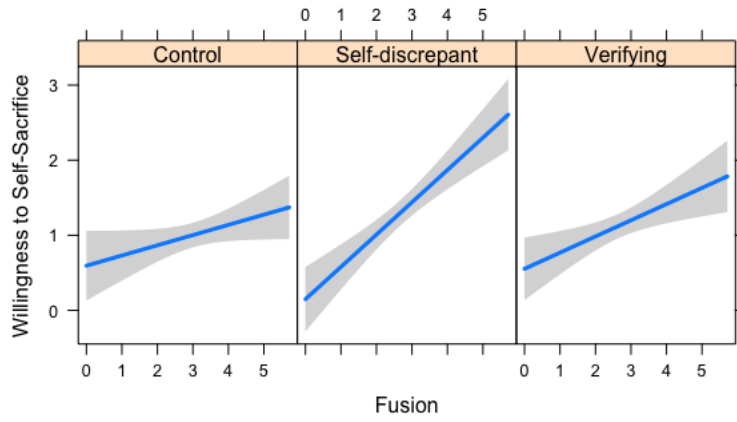
Figure 2.1:   Study 6 interaction between fusion and experimental manipulation in predicting willingness to self-sacrifice
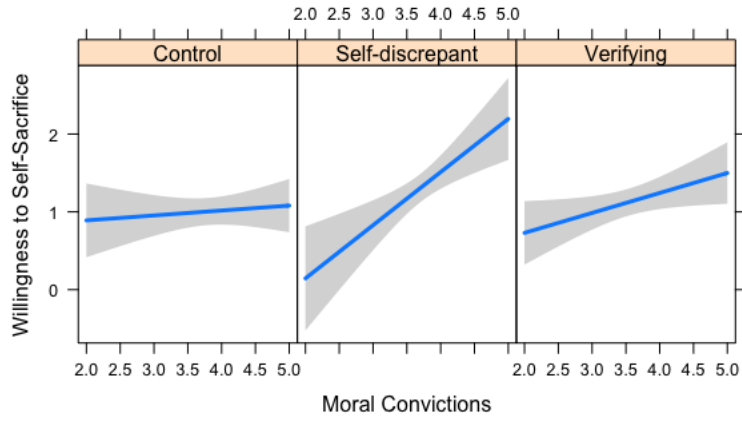
Figure 2.2:   Study 6 interaction between moral convictions and experimental manipulation in predicting willingness to self-sacrifice

In contrast, sacred values were not a significantly stronger predictor of willingness to self-sacrifice for the cause in the self-disconfirming condition compared to the control condition ($p = 0.999$) or in the verifying condition compared to the control condition ($p = 0.498$).

Finally, the significant interactions discussed above qualified a marginal main effect of the experimental manipulation on sacrifice for the cause ($F(2,194) = 2.61$, $p = 0.076$, $\eta2 = 0.03$). This marginal main effect of $\eta2 = 0.03$ could be considered small ($\eta2 = 0.01$) to medium ($\eta2 = 0.06$) based on conventional interpretations of eta squared effect sizes (Cohen, 1988).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

If it is clear that true believers are movers and shakers who shape the future of the world, it is less clear what drives them to behave as they do. We attempted to address this gap in the literature by determining if three variables--sacred values, moral convictions and identity fusion—might contribute to the extreme behaviors of true believers. The results of six studies supported some, but not all, of our expectations. As anticipated, our findings consistently showed that although measures of the three constructs were correlated, they loaded onto separate factors. This suggests that the three predictors are related but distinct. Further support for this conclusion emerged when we entered the three predictors into simultaneous multiple regressions in which the outcome was endorsement of fighting and dying for a cause. The results of these regressions indicated that when we controlled for the effects of the other variables, identity fusion emerged as the strongest predictor.

Why was identity fusion a stronger predictor of self-sacrifice than either sacred values or moral convictions? We originally hypothesized that the predictive power of identity fusion stems from its sensitivity to the degree to which the personal-self is aligned with the target of fusion.

Contrary to this hypothesis, affirming the personal-self in Studies 2, 3, and 5 did not strengthen the relationship between fusion and endorsement of extreme behavior for the cause.

Nevertheless, in Study 6, providing participants with self-disconfirming feedback interacted with identity fusion such that highly fused participants were particularly inclined to endorse extreme behavior and weakly fused participants were particularly disinclined to endorse extreme behavior. Perhaps disconfirming the self is a particularly effective way of activating the personal self. Alternatively, or in addition, having several experts disconfirm one's self-views may represent a potent threat that compels actions designed to neutralize perceived threats.

Another approach to understanding the power of fusion to predict willingness to self-sacrifice for a cause is to consider why its rivals were relatively weak predictors. Consider sacred values. Whereas indices of identity fusion are framed in terms of positive sentiments (e.g., "I have a deep emotional bond with my position on gun control", "Gun control is me"), indices of sacred values are framed in terms of negative sentiments (e.g., "My position on gun control is something that I should not sacrifice, no matter what the benefits (money or something else)", "My position on gun control is non-negotiable"). The negative framing of the sacred values items may be less motivating than the positive framing of the fusion items. A related possibility is that measures of sacred values focus on moral prohibitions against "selling out" (i.e., abdicating one's values for material gain). Given that people are terrible at estimating their ability to resist social pressures (e.g., Milgram, 1963), answers to questions about selling out may be inherently unreliable. In any event, the value of positive framing might explain the success of measures of sacred values in predicting costly self-sacrifices on the battlefield in Iraq, as in that context sacred values are framed as a component of the fighters' battle cry (Gómez et al., 2017). An alternative explanation for the anemic performance of sacred values in our studies

is that sacred values are particularly influential in the context of intergroup conflicts (e.g., Sheikh et al., 2012) and such conflicts were not emphasized in our studies.

Like sacred values, moral convictions were a weaker predictor of endorsing self-sacrifice for a cause than identity fusion. Even so, moral convictions were a stronger predictor of self-sacrifice than sacred values. One reason for this is suggested by the results of Study 6. In that study, self-disconfirming feedback strengthened the relation between endorsement of self-sacrifice and both moral convictions and fusion (but not sacred values). Future research could seek to identify the mechanisms underlying these findings.

Limitations, Implications, and Related Formulations

The results of our studies indicate that all three of the constructs we focused on here (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion) were correlated with endorsement of fighting and dying for a cause. This suggests that measures of all three constructs could be used to identify potential true believers. That said, our simultaneous multiple regressions indicated that identity fusion was the most powerful predictor of endorsement of extreme behavior in our studies. Hence, it may be that researchers interested in extreme behavior will get more "bang for their buck" if they measure fusion rather than sacred values or moral convictions.

Of course, it may be that measures of sacred values or moral convictions would have been more effective if we had examined alignment with groups, other causes or if we had focused on different outcome measures. Moreover, even if our measure of identity fusion were generally superior to the measures of the rival constructs, this could say more about the measures themselves rather than the constructs they were designed to measure. For example, it could be that our measure of identity fusion is psychometrically superior to the particular measures of

sacred values and moral convictions but that more reliable or valid measures of these rival variables would out-predict the identity fusion measure. Future research should explore these possibilities.

The six online surveys reported here provided consistent evidence that identity fusion, sacred values, and moral convictions all positively predicted stated willingness to fight and die for a cause. Whether and how support for such extreme actions would translate into actual behavior is beyond the scope of these studies. That said, field research conducted during the 2011 Libyan civil war indicated that fusion with one's battalion was associated with whether militiamen volunteered to fight on the front lines rather than provide logistical support (Whitehouse et al., 2014). Other recent research conducted in prisons indicated that fusion with religion is associated with costly sacrifices for religion among inmates incarcerated because of Islamist terrorism (Gómez et al., 2021). The results of these studies thus provide some evidence that identity fusion is related to behavior in naturally occurring settings.

Of relevance to the true believer theme with which we opened this article, our findings suggest that people who are strongly fused with a cause may sometimes constitute "radicals-in-waiting", especially if their cherished cause or their personal identity is threatened. Of course, whether highly fused persons actually radicalize depends on the target of their fusion; individuals who are strongly fused with radical jihadists are much more likely to fight and die for their group than those who are strongly fused with a rock band.

If being fused with certain groups or ideologies makes individuals potential radicals, then it makes sense to build comprehensive models of the variables that may prompt highly fused people to translate their feelings of fusion into violent action. The devoted actor model (Atran & Ginges, 2015), which combines identity fusion with sacred values, represents one such model

(although our findings offered little evidence for the unique predictive utility of sacred values). Another candidate is the 3N model (e.g., Bélanger et al., 2018, 2019; Webber & Kruglanski, 2016), which examines the influence of needs, narratives, and social networks on radicalization. Due to its expansiveness, the 3N model provides a relatively comprehensive model of the variables that may motivate true believers to translate their convictions into extreme behavior.

Our evidence in Study 6 that a threat to the personal-self amplified the effect of identity fusion is consistent with the 3N model's emphasis on the importance of the desire for personal significance. It is also reminiscent of Hoffer's (1951) comments on the role of perceived threat among true believers: "A rising mass movement attracts and holds a following not by its doctrine and promises but by the refuge it offers from the anxieties, barrenness and meaninglessness of an individual existence..." (Hoffer, 1951). Through their identity fusion with a cause, true believers may feel the self and the target of fusion to be functionally equivalent, which makes defending the target equivalent to defending the self (Swann et al., 2009, 2012).

Overall, we uncovered consistent evidence that identity fusion was the strongest predictor of willingness to fight and die regardless of participants' position regarding abortion or gun rights. That said, the fact that our sample in Study 6 was predominantly composed of pro-choice participants (178 pro-choice, 19 pro-life) raises the possibility that the results of this particular study were primarily driven by pro-choice participants.

Although our discussion thus far has focused on the dangers that true believers pose to the world-at-large, it is important to acknowledge that the degree of threat posed by true believers depends largely on the nature of the cause to which they are fused. In fact, identity fusion is socially beneficial in some instances. For example, students who are fused to their universities were more inclined to persist in college (Talaifar et al., 2021).

These caveats notwithstanding, when true believers become fused with terrorists or violent insurgents, it is important to develop effective intervention strategies (e.g., Kruglanski et al., 2014). Our findings suggest that the road to deradicalization will be a steep and thorny one for those who become fused with a cause because, for such individuals, deradicalization will mean relinquishing an aspect of their personal-self. One strategy for managing the zealotry of true believers is to re-direct their passions from destruction (e.g., terrorism) to construction (e.g., building community). Alternatively, it may be possible to diminish identity fusion by degrading relational ties to other advocates of the group or cause (Gómez et al., 2019). In the latter case, focusing on disengagement from the group could be more effective than de-radicalization, as the latter requires surmounting the high bar of de-sacralization or de-fusion with a cause. Although the most effective way of dealing with true believers gone bad is not yet apparent, it is clear that achieving this goal is vitally important. Rather than attempting to bring true believers to disbelieve, it may be more realistic to bring them to believe in something else.

Chapter 3: Identity Fusion and Support for Authoritarianism in the Run-up to the US Insurrection of 2021

"The only good Democrat is a dead Democrat" - A Retweet by Former President Donald Trump

Authoritarianism is on the rise throughout the world (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2022)[2]. Yet if this much is clear, why it is rising and what can be done about it is not. We address these issues in this report. We propose that identity fusion (i.e., strong alignment) with authoritarian leaders causes followers to perceive members of the opposition as existential threats. Strongly fused persons consequently react to threats by endorsing authoritarian actions against outgroup members. In contrast, we propose that fusion with the superordinate category "America" will diminish the tendency to see members of the other party as existential threats. They will consequently refrain from endorsing authoritarian actions against perceived opponents. We tested these predictions in a panel study of the 2020 presidential race between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. To contextualize this research, we focus on recent developments within the American Right-Wing that have eroded support for American democracy and fomented a corresponding rise in authoritarianism.

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[2] This chapter is an article currently under peer-review written by the current author (first author) and William Swann (last author) and others. All authors contributed to the study design. The first author prepared the study materials and collected the data. Data analysis and interpretation was performed in part by the first author and in part by the second author (Philip Moniz) under the direction of the last author. An initial version of the manuscript was drafted by the first author and reviewed and revised by the last author. All authors completed revisions in response to peer review and approved the final manuscript for submission. Citation: Martel, F. A., Moniz, P., Ashokkumar, A., & Swann, W.B. Jr. (Under Review). Identity fusion and support for authoritarianism in the run-up to the US insurrection of 2021.

Democracy on the Decline in Contemporary America

Although support for democracy is declining throughout the world (Foa & Mounk, 2016), the decline in the United States has been particularly striking. For example, whereas 75% of Americans born in the 1930s considered democracy to be essential, only 30% of Americans born in the 1980s considered it essential (Foa & Mounk, 2016). This precipitous decline in support for Democracy is likely associated with a more general drop in faith in the political system. Most Americans (61%) contend that significant changes are needed in the fundamental design and structure of American government (Pew, 2018). Many also believe that the government is corrupt, with 72% asserting that money buys political influence (Pew, 2018).

The erosion of trust in the political system among Americans is compounded by a widening partisan divide. Most Republicans and Democrats believe that few – or no – good ideas come from the other party (Pew, 2019). Disdain for the opposing party extends beyond policies. For example, members of opposing parties no longer agree about 'basic facts' (Pew, 2019) and are increasingly reluctant to date or marry across party lines (Iyengar et al., 2019). Researchers have even coined a term for this extreme partisan division: political sectarianism, or the tendency to adopt a moralized identification with one political group and against another (Finkel et al., 2020).

To be sure, loss of faith in one's government and partisan rancor do not automatically lead to the embrace of authoritarianism. Nevertheless, these phenomena may increase openness to alternative political systems. Of particular relevance here, these developments have recently encouraged some Americans to embrace the authoritarian sentiments of former president Donald Trump.

Donald Trump and the Ascent of Authoritarianism

As president, Donald Trump expressed hostility toward outgroup members as illustrated by his endorsement of the "only good Democrat is a dead Democrat" tweet with which we opened this report (Folley, 2020). He also called for authoritarian actions against those who disagreed with him. For example, he ordered a harsh crackdown on progressive protesters in Portland during the Summer of 2020 (BBC, 2020) and oversaw the use of tear gas to remove mostly peaceful protesters from a location near the White House (Bender & Gurman, 2020).

Trump has also displayed a knack for attracting supporters who are sympathetic to authoritarian messages and denigrations of outgroups. Trump supporters scored higher in authoritarian aggression and group-based dominance than supporters of other 2016 presidential candidates (Womick et al., 2019). Moreover, Trump supporters endorsed disproportionate killing of enemy civilians using nuclear weapons in a hypothetical war (Slovic et al., 2020). Furthermore, outgroup hostility was a stronger predictor of voting for Trump than economic insecurity, education level, and other variables (Fording & Schram, 2018; Smith & Hanley, 2018; Schaffner et al., 2018). Finally, Trump supporters' self-reports suggested they are drawn to aggressive, intolerant leaders who promised to restore the "rightful" societal order that placed white males at the top (Smith & Hanley, 2018).

Given their affinity for aggressive, intolerant leaders, it is not surprising that some Trump supporters are themselves violent (Swaine & Adolophe, 2019). As of May 2020, court records cited 54 criminal cases in which admiration for President Trump contributed to violent acts and threats of assault (Levine, 2020). This effect appears to be specific to Trump supporters, as no such instances have been reported involving former Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush, or current President Joe Biden. Surely the most notorious instance of violence enacted by Trump supporters occurred on January 6, 2021 when his supporters attempted to stop Congress

from affirming Trump's defeat in the presidential election. That said, some Trump supporters refrained from endorsing his attempted coup. This leads one to ask what distinguishes a casual Trump voter from a "True Believer".

Identity Fusion: Accelerant or Antidote to Authoritarianism?

Identity may play a role in the tendency for some Trump supporters to endorse and enact violent, punitive behaviors toward perceived rivals. Research on identity fusion suggests that when people's identities become "fused with" a group, the group becomes a core aspect of who they are (Martel et al., 2021; Swann et al., 2009, 2012). When fusion occurs, the boundaries between representations of the self and the group become porous and strongly fused individuals become especially sensitive to threats to their group. When strongly fused individuals encounter a threat to their group, they may be inclined to take strong actions to ward off such threats, including fighting and dying for the group (e.g., Gómez et al., 2011; Talaifar & Swann, 2019). Similarly, when faced with outgroup threat, fans who were fused with a Brazilian soccer team expressed elevated support for violence (Newson et al., 2018).

Violence may also emerge when strongly fused individuals encounter threats to the group to which they are fused. In a prospective study of Israelis before and during the 2015 stabbing intifada, the threat introduced by the intifada bolstered the relationship between fusion with Judaism and endorsement of retaliation against Palestinians (Fredman et al., 2017). Fusion with other causes such as gun rights and abortion (e.g., Martel et al., 2021; Ashokkumar et al., 2020) or even other individuals (e.g., Walsh & Neff, 2018) has also been linked to extreme pro-group actions. Of particular relevance here, when people were strongly fused with Donald Trump, they

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endorsed authoritarian actions toward outgroup members (e.g., Muslims, Iranians, and immigrants), especially when they felt threatened (Kunst et al., 2019).

Threat-induced authoritarian actions against outgroups members may not be inevitable, however. Common ingroup identity theory (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) has proposed that when a common identity is salient, competing groups will look beyond their differences. This process, dubbed "recategorization", has been shown to foster more favorable attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups (Gaertner et al., 2016). For example, a recent study by Levendusky (2018) demonstrated that increasing the salience of a common ingroup (America) reduced partisan animosity between Republicans and Democrats. The common ingroup identity approach has focused on demonstrating the benefits of activating common ingroup identities through recategorization manipulations. Nevertheless, the theory has implications for the influence of existing group allegiances that have not been activated.

Consider that people are often fused to multiple groups that are nested within one another. Partisans in the United States, for example, may be simultaneously fused to the United States as well as to leader of their party. At times these nested group identities could compete with one another. For example, fusion with political leaders (Biden vs. Trump) could exaggerate perceived differences between members of rival parties (Ahler & Sood, 2018). Strongly fused persons may consequently perceive outparty members as existential threats and this may, in turn, motivate authoritarian actions against them. At the same time, fusion with a higher-level, "superordinate" identity (the United States) could foster feelings of unanimity with outparty members. These feelings of unanimity may make members of rival parties seem less threatening, thereby reducing or eliminating the felt need for authoritarian actions to control them.

To empirically test our argument that fusion with nested groups could differentially predict animosity toward outgroups, we conducted a panel study during a particularly volatile time period: the 2020 American Presidential Election. In three waves, we examined changes in people's identities and attitudes during this historic time. Waves occurred just before the 2020 US Presidential Election, soon after the election, and soon after the January 6 insurrection. Participants were limited to supporters of either Trump or Biden. All participants completed measures of three targets of identity fusion: their party's candidate, their party, and the United States. The primary outcome measures were perception of members of the opposing party as existential threats and endorsement of authoritarian actions against them.

Our first key prediction was that identity fusion with an authoritarian leader (Donald Trump), would augment perceived threat from Democrats and perceived threat would, in turn, increase endorsement of authoritarian actions against them. We did not expect this pattern as a function of fusion with Joe Biden, as he has no history of endorsing authoritarian activities. Our second key prediction was that, among both Biden and Trump supporters, identity fusion with the United States would diminish the perception of the opposing party as an existential threat and this would, in turn, diminish endorsement of authoritarian actions against them. Finally, we recognized that affective polarization—the degree to which partisans feel warmer toward their party than towards the opposing party—has come under a great deal of scrutiny because of its sharp increase in recent years (Iyengar et al., 2012) and its potential harmfulness to the functioning of democracy (Kingzette et al., 2021, but see Broockman et al., 2022). To test the possibility that affective polarization rather than identity fusion might motivate authoritarian actions against perceived adversaries, we measured it in our research.

METHOD

Participants

We collected three waves of data on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) from supporters of either Donald Trump or Joe Biden. We leveraged the CloudResearch platform (AKA TurkPrime) to enhance the functionality of MTurk (Litman et al., 2017). Wave 1 occurred one week before the 2020 American Presidential Election; Wave 2 occurred one week after the election; and Wave 3 occurred one week after the January 6 insurrection. The original sample in Wave 1 consisted of 1498 voters (575 Trump supporters, 923 Biden supporters). For the remaining waves, we set recruitment goals of roughly 400 per candidate (Wave 2) and 300 per candidate (Wave 3). We met both recruitment goals, such that in Wave 2 we obtained 404 pro-Trump voters and 406 pro-Biden voters and in Wave 3 we obtained 288 pro-Trump voters and 310 pro-Biden voters).

To implement a longitudinal design using MTurk and CloudResearch we used participants' unique MTurk worker IDs to track them across waves. Using the enhanced recruitment functionality of the CloudResearch platform, we made the later waves of our survey available only to participants who had completed the earlier waves. To encourage participant retention across waves we sent messages to eligible participants to let them know the new waves of our study were available. We also increased the participant pay from $0.25 in Wave 1 to $0.50 in Waves 2 and 3. Participants were told in both the MTurk study ad and in the consent form that Waves 2 and 3 were follow-up surveys to a survey they had completed earlier.

Comparisons of participants who persisted in subsequent samples showed some differences such that those who remained were initially more fused with the US than those who dropped out (Cohen's $d = .26$, $p < .001$). Likewise, Trump supporters who remained until Wave 3 were more fused with Trump at baseline than those who dropped in Wave 3 (Cohen's $d = .18$, $p < .001$), with a similar pattern occurring for fusion with the Republican Party. We suspect that strongly fused participants were quicker to take the follow-up surveys than weakly fused persons due to their greater interest in the topic. In any event, this effect did not generalize to Democrats, as there were no significant differences in overall means across waves between fusion with Biden, fusion with Democratic Party, outgroup existential threat, support for authoritarian actions, or affective polarization. More details on participant demographic information across waves can be found in the appendices (Appendix B1).

Procedure

After consenting to take the survey, participants completed a screener question indicating which candidate they supported in the 2020 American presidential election. Only participants who selected Donald Trump or Joe Biden proceeded with the survey. Participants then received all measures in randomized order, followed by some demographic questions. Items were tailored to participants' political preference (e.g., Trump supporters completed measures of fusion with Trump, Biden supporters responded to fusion with Biden items), After completing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed. Subsequent waves followed the same procedure. Only participants who completed Wave 1 of the survey were eligible to complete Wave 2 and only participants who had completed both of the first two waves were eligible to complete Wave 3.

Materials

Participants completed the three measures of fusion (with candidate, party, and United States), perception of opposing party as an existential threat, support for authoritarian actions against opposing party, and affective polarization associated with political party. Brief descriptions of these measures are included below. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach Alphas, and t-tests comparing the means of all measures between supporters of Biden and Trump can be found in the appendices (Appendix B2). A comprehensive list of the items included in each measure can found in Appendix B3.

Identity Fusion. We measured identity fusion using a truncated 3-item version (as in Talaifar et al., 2020) of the standard 7-item verbal identity fusion scale (Gómez et al., 2011). Each fusion scale focused on one of three targets: 1) the preferred presidential candidate (Donald Trump or Joe Biden), 2), the associated political party (the Republican Party or the Democratic Party), and 3) the U.S. Example items include "[Donald Trump / Joe Biden] is me" and "I make the United States strong".

Outgroup Existential Threat. We measured the perception that the opposing political party is an existential threat to the American way of life using a 5-item measure adapted from Wohl & Branscombe's (2009) measure of collective angst. The items focused on the opposing political party. For example, participants who supported Trump would see items such as "I think the future of the American way of life is under threat from Democrats", whereas participants who supported Biden would see items such as "I believe that Republicans are purposefully trying to undermine the American way of life".

Support for Authoritarian Actions against Opposing Party. We created a six-item measure of the degree to which participants personally supported authoritarian actions designed to benefit their own political party at the expense of the opposing party. On seven-point scales

ranging from 1 (Strongly oppose) to 7 (Strongly support), participants indicated their support for each of six actions: Disbanding Congress, Using the military to take control of the government, Locking up key members of the mainstream media, Seeking out help from foreign governments to help win the election, Cutting off resources for [liberal/conservative] cities or states, Personally engaging in violent protests.

Affective Polarization toward Political Parties. Using a feeling thermometer that ranged from 0-100 (Iyengar et al., 2012), participants indicated how positively they felt toward both their political party and the opposition party. The difference between these two items constituted the index of affective polarization, with larger numbers indicated greater polarization.

RESULTS

We were interested in whether identity fusion with a presidential candidate would be associated with changes in support for authoritarian actions, especially in response to threats to that candidate (e.g., losing the election). We began by assessing changes in our key variables in response to the election results. After this analysis, we tested our prediction that perceived threat would mediate the impact of fusion with Trump on support for authoritarian actions. We also asked if, among either Trump or Biden supporters, fusion with the United States would serve as a counterforce, predicting *less* perceived existential threat and *less* endorsement of authoritarian actions against outgroup members. Finally, we conducted an exploratory analysis to determine if affective polarization moderated our key findings.

Changes in Fusion with Candidate over Time

We first estimated linear models with unit fixed effects to determine whether fusion with leader changed over time among Trump or Biden supporters. This was modeled by interacting leader preference with wave while controlling for fusion with the US and outgroup existential threat. As shown in Figure 3.1, from Wave 1 to Wave 2, fusion with leaders rose for both Biden and Trump supporters, ($B = .124$, 95% CI [.017, .231], $t = 2.27$, $p = .024$). Although this rise in fusion among the losing Trump supporters might seem surprising given his loss, there was sufficient ambiguity regarding the outcome of the election that members of both parties could readily imagine that their candidate was victorious. By Wave 3 the outcome had become clear, however, with the result that fusion with Biden increased and fusion with Trump decreased ($B = .318$, 95% CI [.147, .489], $t = 3.65$, $p < .001$).
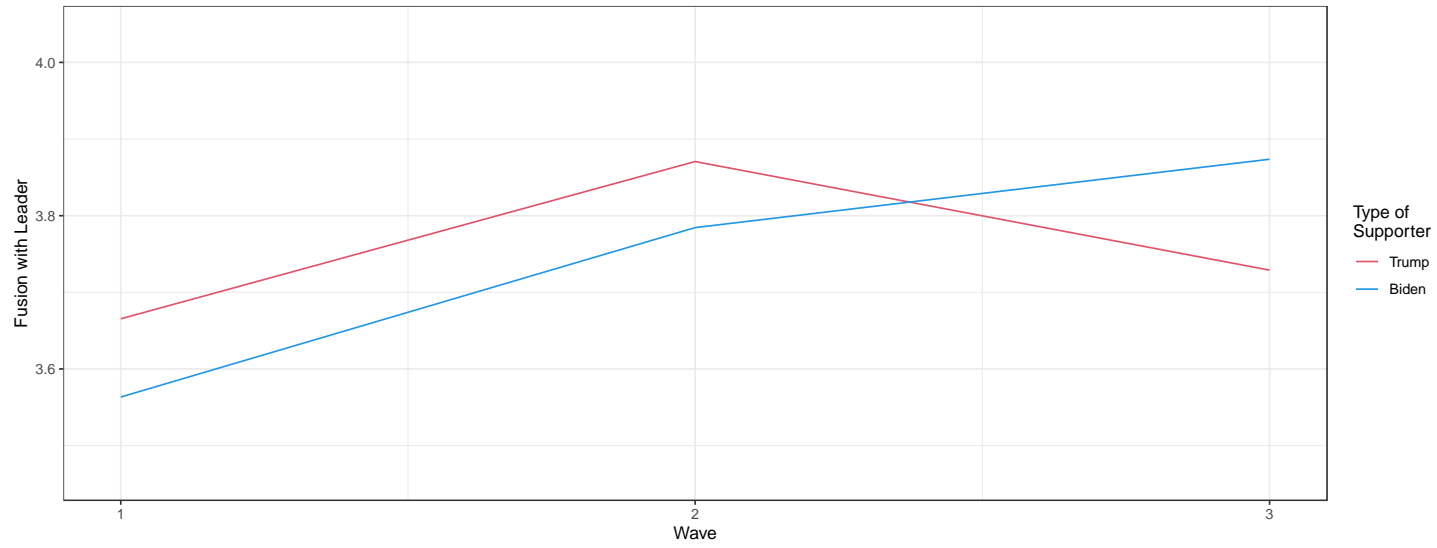
Figure 3.1:   Fusion with Trump or Biden changing over time.

The tendency for strongly fused participants to report changes in fusion over time may seem to challenge fusion theory's irrevocability principle ("once fused always fused"; Swann et al., 2012). Nevertheless, when one focuses on the period associated with the most change (between Waves 2 and 3), a more nuanced scenario emerges. First, the correlation between fusion with leader during Wave 2 and Wave 3 was substantial among strongly fused (upper tertile) Trump [r (88) = .62, p < .001] and Biden supporters, [r (102) = .60, p <.001]. These relatively high correlations provide evidence for stability, as they indicate that the most and least fused persons generally retained their rank orderings. Second, although the average levels of *fusion with Trump* may have declined from Wave 2 to Wave 3, levels of *Trumpism*—as indicated by support for authoritarian actions—actually increased. That is, the graphs in Figure 3.2 reveal that the most highly fused Trump supporters increased their support for authoritarian actions more than any other group. Further evidence for this conclusion comes from a linear model predicting support for authoritarian actions with unit fixed effects. This analysis revealed a significant three-way interaction between leader preference, fusion with leader, and wave (B = .108, 95% CI [.025, .191], t = 2.54, p = .011). From this vantage point, fusion with Trump did not fade away; rather, it morphed into Trumpism *sans* Trump.
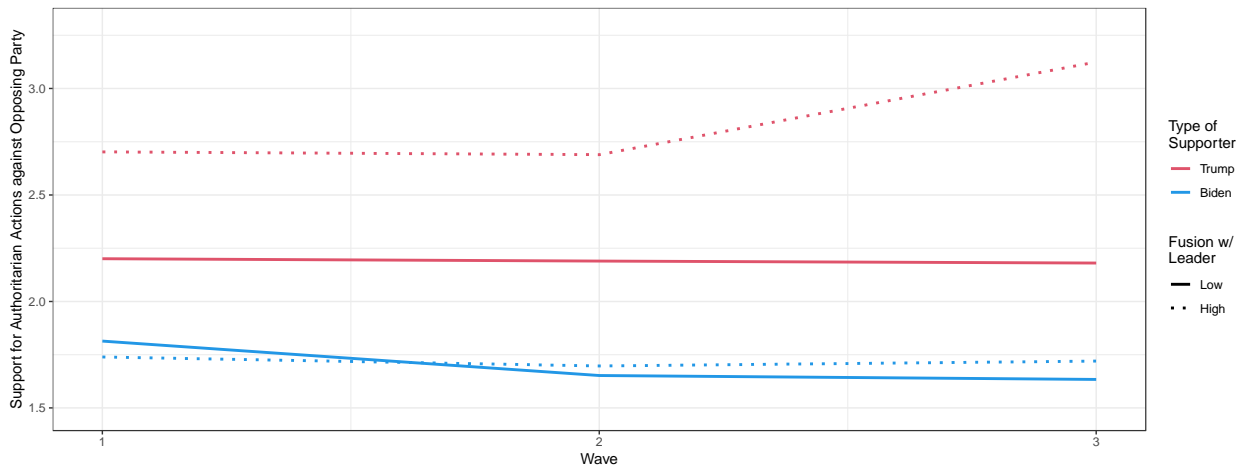
Figure 3.2: Among strongly fused Trump supporters, support for authoritarian actions spiked after January 6 but remained moderate among weakly fused Trump supporters and low among Biden supporters.

Whether identity fusion with Trump morphed into Trumpism or not, its effects were clearly distinct from fusion with Biden. For example, Figure 3.2 shows that even among strongly fused Biden supporters, support for authoritarian actions remained lower than it was for Trump supporters across all three waves (e.g., Biden supporters' $M_{\text{Wave 1}}$ = 1.79 vs. Trump supporters' $M_{\text{Wave 1}}$ = 2.42, Cohen's d = .62, t = 10.84, $p < .001$). Note that for presentational purposes, we split strongly fused and weakly fused participants at the median fusion value, such that participants above the median were considered strongly fused with their candidate and those below the median were considered weakly fused.

Fusion with Trump, Outgroup Existential Threat, and Support for Authoritarian Actions

To test the hypothesis that outgroup existential threat would mediate the impact of fusion with Trump on support for authoritarian actions, we computed mediation models using the mediation R package (Imai et al., 2010). We employed bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapped confidence intervals. To maximize statistical power, we included Biden as well as Trump supporters. To strengthen our (admittedly modest) claims of causality, we controlled for baseline values of the mediator and outcome variables (VanderWeele, 2015). We used fusion with leader during Wave 1 as the predictor, outgroup existential threat during Wave 2 as the mediator, chosen leader as a moderator, and support for authoritarian actions during Wave 3 as the outcome. As shown in Figure 3.3, the analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant indirect effect of fusion with Trump through perceived outgroup threat on support for authoritarian actions (B=.008, 95% CI [.000, .020, p=.044). This estimate suggests 8% of the total effect of fusion is mediated by outgroup threat. This hints at a causal process in which

support for authoritarian actions rose because strongly fused partisans became sensitized to the

threat posed by the other party.
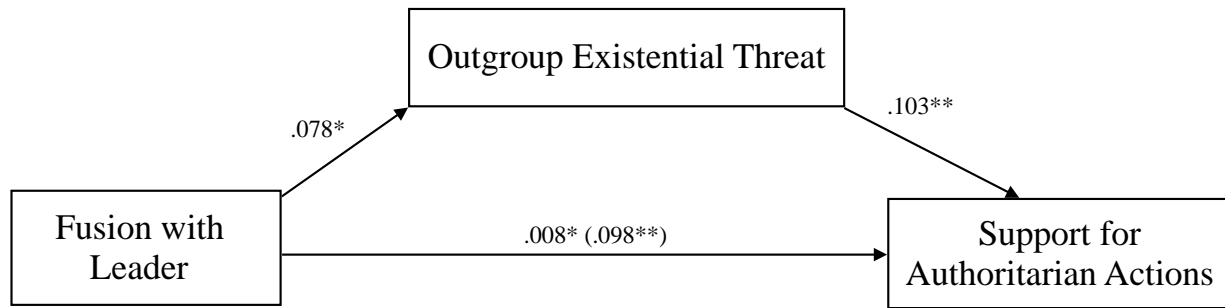
Figure 3.3:   Effect of fusion with Trump on support for authoritarian actions mediated by higher outgroup existential threat.

Affective Polarization vs. Fusion with Trump as Predictors of Support for Authoritarian Actions

Trump supporters may have become supportive of authoritarian actions due to affective polarization (i.e., hate for Democrats) rather than identity fusion with Trump. To test this possibility, we used indices of affective polarization and fusion with Trump to predict change in support for authoritarian actions between Waves 1 and 3 while controlling for baseline values of all the variables and using clustered standard errors. The resulting regression coefficients are displayed in Figure 3.4. Change in fusion with Trump positively predicted change in support for authoritarian actions, whereas change in affective polarization did not. Apparently, increases in identity fusion with Trump rather than animosity toward Democrats was responsible for increasing support for authoritarian actions.
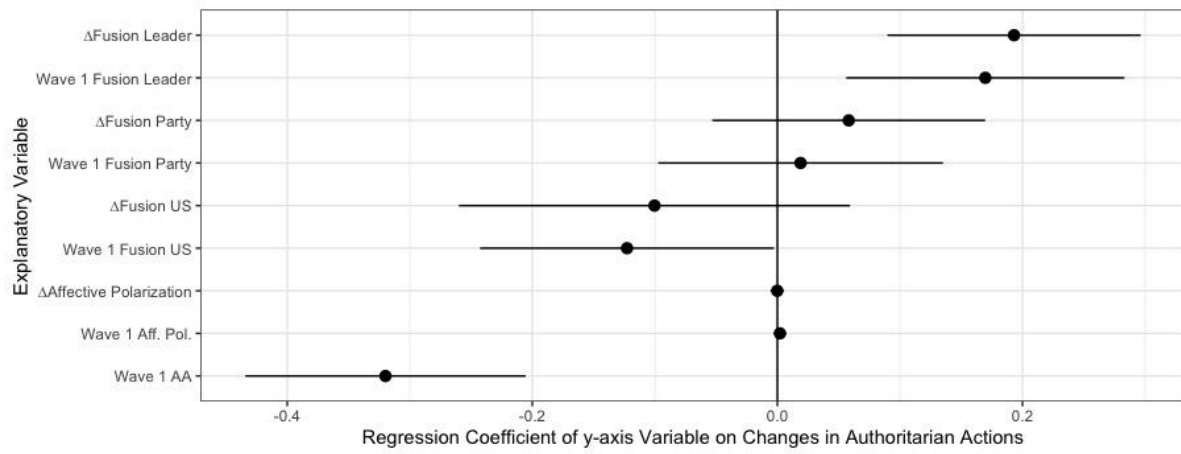
Figure 3.4:   Linear regression model predicting change in Trump supporters' support for authoritarian actions from waves 1-3.

Fusion with United States Countered Fusion with Trump

The foregoing data point to some potential dangers of fusion with an authoritarian leader. This does not mean that the effects of fusion are invariably negative, however, as fusion to other targets might attenuate such effects. We hypothesized that fusion with the United States, a superordinate identity associated with shared democratic principles, could offset the effects of fusion with Trump.

Over the course of the election cycle, fusion with the United States remained stable (see Appendix B4, Figure B4.1) and higher than fusion with Trump (Ms = 5.62, 3.67, respectively), suggesting that it might be influential. We accordingly compared the predictive power of fusion with Trump during Wave 1 and fusion with US during Wave 1 on support for authoritarian actions during Wave 3. We used the coefficient estimates from the model presented in Figure 3.4 to generate predicted values. The results are displayed in the left panel of Figure 3.5. The solid line shows that the more fused participants were with the US during Wave 1, the *less* supportive of authoritarian actions they were during Wave 3 (B = -0.123, 95% CI [-0.244, -0.001], t = -2.01, p = .049). In contrast, the dashed line indicates that the more participants were fused with Trump during Wave 1, the *more* they endorsed authoritarian actions during Wave 3 (B = .170, 95% CI [.054, .285], p = .004). The correlation between the two fusions is .53 ($p < .001$), suggesting that individual Trump supporters were experiencing a conflict along these lines: "Should I hold fast to my democratic principles as a US citizen or align myself with the person I voted for?"
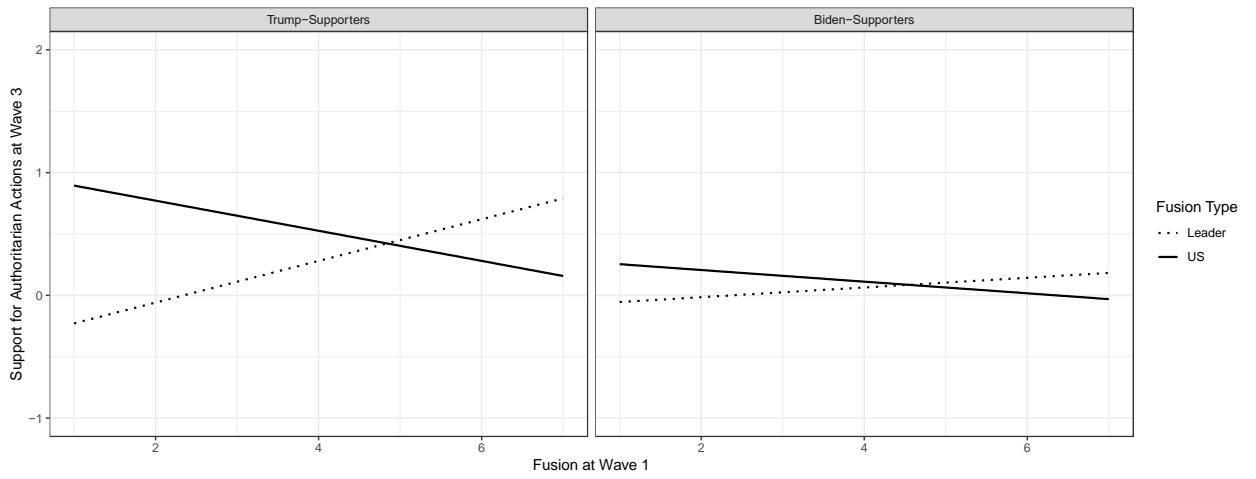
Figure 3.5:   Fusion with leader vs. fusion with US predict support for authoritarian actions in opposite directions, especially (significantly) among Trump supporters.

The right panel of Figure 3.5 displays predicted support for authoritarian actions during Wave 3 among Biden supporters. The trends paralleled those of Trump supporters but were weaker and non-significant. That is, fusion with the US during Wave 1 had a negative but non-significant association with support for authoritarian actions during Wave 3 (B = -.047, 95% CI [-.118, .024], t = -1.327, p = .188). In contrast, fusion with Joe Biden was positive but non-significant (B = .040, 95% CI [-.059, .138], t = .796, p = .428).

The overall pattern of data for Trump supporters suggests that, to a degree, their relatively high levels of fusion to country may have held their support for authoritarian actions in check. Conceivably, fusion with the US may have exerted its influence by encouraging Trump supporters to see Democrats as fellow Americans who were therefore not an existential threat. When we conducted a regression in which fusion with the US was the primary predictor, perceived ingroup threat was the mediator and endorsement of authoritarian actions during Wave 3 was the outcome (controlling for baseline values of the mediator and outcome as well as leader preference and fusions with leader and party), the results supported this idea. The results plotted in Figure 3.6 indicate that fusion with the US during Wave 1 had a negative effect on perceived outgroup threat during Wave 2, which had a positive effect on support for authoritarian actions during Wave 3. (B=-.010, 95% CI [-.025, -.001], p=.012). Simply put, fusion with the US tempered support for authoritarian actions against Democrats by decreasing how threatening Trump supporters perceived Democrats to be.

Outgroup Existential Threat

-.068*

.104**

Fusion with US

-.01* (-.047^)

Support for
Authoritarian Actions
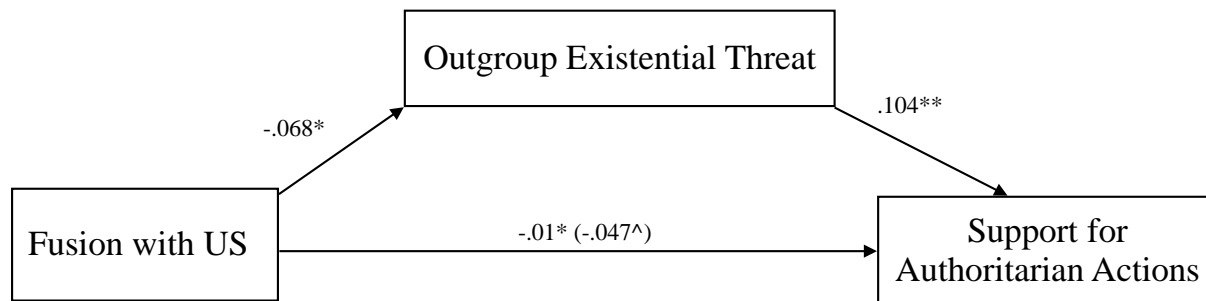
Note: ^ = .100 > p >.050

Figure 3.6: Fusion with US's negative effect on authoritarian actions mediated by lower
outgroup existential threat.

Summary of Results

The results of our analyses show a public whose posture toward the candidates was in flux around the 2020 election. This was particularly true after the election results became clear, in that average fusion with party leader rose for the winning Biden supporters and fell for the losing Trump supporters. Nevertheless, inspection of the test-retest correlations of fusion with leader during Wave 2 and Wave 3 indicated that the rank orders of fusion scores of strongly fused participants remained stable. Moreover, after the election, Trumpism rose among strongly fused Trump supporters, as indicated by increased endorsement of authoritarian actions against Democrats. In contrast, Biden supporters displayed uniformly low rates of endorsement of authoritarian actions against Republicans. Overall, the analyses supported our expectation that outgroup existential threat statistically mediated the effect of fusion with Trump on support for authoritarian actions. Finally, among Trump supporters, fusion with the United States predicted lower support for authoritarian actions against the Democrats, apparently because fusion with the United States made Democrats seem less threatening.

DISCUSSION

We conducted a three-wave panel study around the 2020 US Presidential election. Our broad goal was to assess the impact of the election results on people's sentiments toward the candidates and members of the opposing party. Identity fusion with both Trump and Biden increased from Wave 1 to Wave 2, when the outcome of the election was uncertain. During Wave 3, when the outcome was clear to almost everyone, fusion with Trump decreased and fusion with Biden increased. This drop in fusion with the losing candidate and a corresponding

increase in fusion with the winner (i.e., Biden) complements parallel evidence from a study of the 2016 presidential election (Misch et al., 2018).

Together, this evidence of changes in fusion could be viewed as evidence against identity fusion theory's irrevocability principle, which holds that strongly fused people will remain fused once they become fused. Although this argument has merit, it is not supported by evidence that the rank orderings of fusion scores among strongly fused participants remained stable from Wave 2 to Wave 3—the period of most precipitous decline of average scores. From this vantage point, the individuals who were most fused remained so despite changes in the aggregate levels of fusion among the most fused group. In a relative sense, then, fusion *was* irrevocable. A further caveat to interpreting the decline in average level of fusion among strongly fused Trump supporters at face value was that diminutions in fusion with Trump were accompanied by increases in perceived threat and endorsement of authoritarian actions against outparty members. Trumpism—and the contempt for Democrats that it espoused—did not decline. Apparently, strong fusion with Trump did not die, it simply morphed into fusion with Trumpism.

Our findings also indicated that among Trump supporters, fusion with Trump during Wave 1, as well as changes in fusion with Trump between Waves 1-3, predicted support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party. In contrast, neither fusion with Biden during Wave 1 nor changes in fusion with Biden between Waves 1-3 predicted perceptions of existential threat nor support for authoritarian actions against Republicans. Further, in mediational models using fusion with Trump during Wave 1 as the predictor, outgroup existential threat during Wave 2 as the mediator, and support for authoritarian actions during Wave 3 as the outcome, 8% of the total effect of fusion on authoritarian actions was mediated by perceived outgroup threat. These

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findings provide initial evidence that fusion with Trump elevates perception of existential threat and this perception, in turn, foments support for authoritarian actions.

The foregoing findings notwithstanding, identity fusion also had socially beneficial effects. In particular, the more fused Trump supporters were with the United States, the *less* supportive they were of authoritarian actions against Democrats in subsequent waves. Fusion with the United States was distinguished from partisan fusion by its tendency to predict *less* rather than *more* perceived existential threat from the opposing party and *reduce* rather than *elevate* endorsement of authoritarian actions. Apparently, fusion with the United States promotes allegiance to Americans of all stripes whereas fusion with Trump fosters allegiance to him and against his opponents. This pattern was weaker and non-significant among Biden supporters, likely because they displayed low rates of endorsement of existential threat and support for authoritarian actions to begin with. The takeaway point here, however, is that fusion with the United States appears to suppress the authoritarian impulses of those who were most inclined to have such impulses (i.e., Trump supporters).

In contrast to identity fusion, affective polarization was a weak and non-significant predictor of endorsement of authoritarian actions against the opposing party. This finding is generally consistent with previous indications that identity fusion is a stronger predictor of extreme behaviors than related constructs such as group identification (Gomez et al., 2020) and sacred values (Martel et al., 2021). Of course, this is not to say that affective polarization does not have merit as a useful predictor of political attitudes or behaviors (see Iyengar et al., 2019; Kingzette et al., 2021; Levendusky, 2018). Rather, we are merely contending that identity fusion appears to be a stronger predictor of support for *extreme behaviors that we examined* than affective polarization.

Our findings build upon previous evidence that fusion with Trump is associated with endorsement of persecution of immigrants (Kunst et al., 2019). In addition to demonstrating that fusion predicts authoritarian actions against co-equals (i.e., outparty members), our findings also show that shifts in fusion have predictive value and that the effects of fusion are mediated by perceived existential threat posed by the outgroup. Furthermore, all of our findings emerged in the context of an event of historic proportions—the insurrection following the 2020 American Presidential Election. Our evidence that Trump supporters whose identities were strongly fused with him were more supportive of authoritarian actions compared to weakly fused persons, coupled with the rise in support for authoritarian actions among the highly fused during the course of the election cycle, provide a chilling empirical parallel to the events that occurred in Washington DC during this period.

Our most hopeful finding involved indications that identity fusion may be a solution as well as cause of the partisan polarization that has recently gripped the United States. Whereas fusion with candidate predicted the perception that members of the opposing party were an existential threat who should be subjugated through authoritarian actions, fusion with the US diminished the desire to take authoritarian action against opposing party members. The latter finding points to a mechanism through which fusion may foster harmony rather than strife between parties. Even so, we acknowledge that promoting fusion with the US might be double-edged sword. Although our data suggest that fusion with the US might reduce the partisan divide within the United States, it might also foment divisions between the US and other countries. The danger is that fusion-related patriotism, a love of one's nation, could morph into nationalism, which involves the conviction that one's nation is superior to others. From this vantage point, attempts to bolster national identity should avoid encouraging patriots to perceive that their

nation is in competition with others, for when this happens one will have simply replaced an internal, intra-country, conflict with an external, international one.

Although the findings reported here suggest that identify fusion can play an important role in intra- and inter-group relations, it is clear that we have only scratched the surface of these relationships. Future research should probe deeper into the highly complex and nuanced role that identity fusion plays in social relations.

CHAPTER 4: A FURTHER FUSION? EXPLORING THE HIGHEST SOCIAL IDENTITY: FUSION WITH HUMANITY

The goal of the current chapter was to directly extend the work from the previous chapter. Although Chapter 3 showed promising prosocial effects of being fused with the United States compared to being fused with partisan targets, I wanted to extend this further to explore an even higher-level superordinate identity than fusion with country. Specifically, I was interested in exploring fusion with humanity, as humanity is a group that contains all human subgroups within it. I was interested in whether fusion with humanity would predict lower hostility and greater prosociality toward everyone, regardless of their demographic identity or group membership. My rationale was that if a person is highly fused with humanity, they should theoretically want the best for all humans. In the present chapter I explored whether fusion with humanity is an identity that individuals adopt and if so, whether this identity has broadly prosocial impacts toward subgroups of people that might otherwise be labeled as outgroups.

Identity Fusion with Humanity: An All-Inclusive Identity?

In the current chapter, I explored a new target of fusion that contains everyone within the ingroup: humanity. Previous work has shown that *identification* with all of humanity predicts prosocial attitudes in myriad spheres (McFarland et al., 2012; Reese et al., 2015). However, *identity fusion* with the target of all of humanity has only recently begun to be empirically investigated (see Landabur & Wilson, 2022). Given that identity fusion with a group consistently predicts more extreme pro-group behaviors than mere identification with the same groups (see Buhrmester & Swann, 2015 for a review) and given that the previous chapter showed that fusion with a superordinate group identity reduces hostility against subgroups contained within that

group (i.e., fusion with US reduces hostility toward rival American partisans), the potential prosocial benefits of fusion with humanity could be impressive. Additionally, by its very definition, viewing humanity as one's ingroup theoretically excludes no other person as an outgroup member. When people become strongly fused with a group, they are increasingly inclined to enact behaviors that are compatible with the group's goals and values, including retribution against outgroups (Fredman et al., 2017). Fusion with humanity has the unique advantage that it allows for no human outgroup, essentially leveraging the prosocial ingroup benefits of fusion without the potential downsides to outgroups.

Fusion with Humanity and Reduced Hostility toward Human Outgroups

To tap hostility toward outgroups, I included two outcome measures. I was primarily interested in the relationship between fusion with humanity and hostility toward a lower-level identity's outgroup, namely members of the opposing political party, so I included a measure of support for authoritarian actions (the measured developed in Martel et al., under review). Considering all of humanity to be your ingroup should naturally predispose people to not want to enact extreme punishment against others, even if those people belong to a different political party. Conversely, holding authoritarian attitudes itself could interfere with a person's ability to fuse with humanity, given that the authoritarian's conviction that they must control the actions of others interferes with feeling connected to them and thus disrupts fusion. Therefore, I predicted that fusion with humanity would be negatively associated with support for authoritarian actions against the opposing political party, much as fusion with the US negatively predicted the same authoritarian sentiment in Chapter 3.

Beyond exploring potential associations between fusion with humanity and authoritarianism, I also was interested in exploring whether there is a negative association

between fusion with humanity and anxiety toward various subgroups of humans. Therefore, I also included a more general measure of outgroup anxiety (Jackson et al., 2020) toward a variety of human outgroups (undocumented immigrants and people of a different race, sexual orientation, religion, political orientation, and country of origin) to explore whether fusion with humanity is negatively associated with anxiety towards these subgroups of humans.

Finally, given that identity fusion with the United States negatively predicted outgroup hostility in the previous chapter, while fusion with a partisan target positively predicted the same outcomes, I also included these two measures of fusion in the current work. The goal of measuring these lower-level targets of fusion in the current study was twofold: (1) to test whether the results from the previous chapter replicated and (2) to directly compare fusion with the US to fusion with humanity to see if one emerged as a stronger predictor of prosociality.

The Current Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the under-researched fusion with humanity construct and to directly compare the predictive power of fusion with humanity to the more-established fusion with the United States to see if either variable is a better negative predictor of antisocial outcomes. To wit, I had three hypotheses.

First, I predicted that fusion with the US would be a better negative predictor of the explicitly political outcomes (i.e., support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party and anxiety toward the opposing party) compared to fusion with humanity. This prediction was based on the specificity-matching principle (Swann et al., 2007). That is, fusion with one's nation is more closely related to attitudes toward political parties than fusion with humanity.

Second, I predicted that fusion with humanity would be a better negative predictor of most of the outgroup anxiety items (excluding anxiety toward the opposing party) because I

reasoned that feeling a sense of oneness with humanity should reduce a person's anxiety toward

all people, even those who belong to different demographic groups. On the other hand, being

fused with the US does not necessarily imply less anxiety toward different demographics.

Finally, I predicted that fusion with political party would *positively* predict both support

for authoritarian actions toward members of the opposing party as well as outgroup anxiety. This

prediction was based upon the findings in Chapter 3, where fusion with the US positively

predicted support for authoritarian actions and outgroup existential threat.

It is worth noting that my three predictions are politically agnostic. That is, I did not

make predictions about differences between the Republican and Democratic participants. This is

partly due to the expectation that the predictions would apply to members of both parties.

Although there may be differences across party for the strength of certain effects, the pattern of

effects should remain largely the same. Therefore, any political differences reported are purely

exploratory and should be interpreted in that light.

METHOD

Participants

I ran a power analysis using the GPower software which showed that to detect an effect

of f^2=.10 with 3 predictors and 95% power, I would need a total sample size of 176 participants. I

collected data from Americans on Amazon Mechanical Turk who indicated that they were

supported either the Republican or Democratic Party, for a total of 531 participants. After

excluding people who failed attention checks, took the survey multiple times, or took both the

Republican and Democratic versions of the survey I was left with a total of 414 participants (190

Republicans: 97 male, 92 female, 1 other; ages 22-80; 224 Democrats: 96 male, 125 female, 3 other; ages 20-73).

Materials

Identity Fusion. I measured three distinct targets of identity fusion using the standard 7-item verbal identity fusion scale (Gómez et al., 2011). Each fusion scale focused on one of three targets: 1) the participant's political party - the Republican Party ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.61$, $\alpha = .96$) or the Democratic Party ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.49$, $\alpha = .94$), 2) the United States (Republicans: $M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.15$, $\alpha = .90$; Democrats: $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.48$, $\alpha = .93$), and 3) humanity (Republicans: $M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.29$, $\alpha = .93$; Democrats: $M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.15$, $\alpha = .89$). Example items include "The [Republican Party/Democratic Party] is me", "I make the United States strong", and "I am one with humanity".

Support for Authoritarian Actions against Opposing Party. I used an adapted version of the six-item measure of support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing political party from Chapter 3 (Martel et al., under review). I added this prompt before the items, "How supportive would you be if [the Republican Party/the Democratic Party] decided to take the following actions". The prompt matched the participant's own political party. On seven-point scales ranging from 1 (Strongly oppose) to 7 (Strongly support), participants indicated their support for each of six actions, which were averaged together (Republicans: $M = 3.65$, $SD = 2.50$, $\alpha = .94$; Democrats: $M = 2.82$, $SD = 2.22$, $\alpha = .95$). The actions were: Disband Congress, Use the military to take control of the government, Imprison members of the media, Seek out help from foreign governments to help win the next election, Cut off resources for [liberal/conservative] cities or

states, Engage in violent protests. The 5th item targeted the opposing political party relative to participants' own party.

Outgroup Anxiety. I measured participants' anxiety toward human outgroups with a series of items adapted from existing work (Jackson et al., 2020). Participants were asked to "rate the extent that the following groups give you anxiety." On 7-point scales ranging from 1 (none at all) to 7 (a great deal), participants indicated their anxiety toward the following targets: people of another race than their own (Republicans: $M = 3.28$, $SD = 2.07$; Democrats: $M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.95$), people of another sexual orientation than their own (Republicans: $M = 3.53$, $SD = 2.03$; Democrats: $M = 2.49$, $SD = 1.92$), undocumented immigrants (Republicans: $M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.96$; Democrats: $M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.93$), people of another religion than their own (Republicans: $M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.96$; Democrats: $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.91$), people of another political party than their own (Republicans: $M = 3.82$, $SD = 2.05$; Democrats: $M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.85$), and people from another country than their own (Republicans: $M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.97$; Democrats: $M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.86$). I ran analyses with each of these measures of anxiety toward the different outgroups individually, as well as with a composite measure of outgroup anxiety where I averaged all of the anxiety items together (Republicans: $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.66$, $\alpha = .91$; Democrats: $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.59$, $\alpha = .91$).

Procedure

There were two versions of the survey: one for Democrats and one for Republicans. The surveys were identical except that political items were adjusted to match participant's own political party and the outgroup party. Participants who indicated that they were 18 or older and consented to take the survey were then shown a screener question asking their political party

affiliation. If they gave the correct answer corresponding to the version of the survey (e.g., "Republican" to take the Republican survey) they were allowed to proceed. Participants completed all scales in random order followed by demographics then were debriefed and paid.

RESULTS

I ran a series of analyses to test my three hypotheses. All analyses were run separately for the Republican and Democratic samples. I started by exploring the predictive power of fusion with humanity in single and multiple-predictor models. To test whether fusion with humanity would negatively predict support for authoritarian actions toward members of the opposing political party as well outgroup anxiety, I first ran a series of stepwise linear regression models with fusion with humanity as the initial predictor, then fusion with humanity and party as predictors, then finally all three fusions as predictors (fusion with humanity, party, and US). The outcome measures were support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party, anxiety toward outgroups overall, and anxiety toward each individual outgroup. Results of these analyses for Republican participants are shown in Table 4.1.

	Fusion with Humanity		Humanity + Political Party		Humanity + Political Party + US	
Outcome	β	95% CI	β	95% CI	β	95% CI
Support for AA (Authoritarian Actions)	.31*	[.03, .58]	-.36*	[-.67, -.04]	-.18	[-.52, .16]
Outgroup Anx (Anxiety)	.19*	[.00, .37]	-.25*	[-.46, -.04]	-.18	[-.41, .05]
Race Anx	.20†	[-.03, .43]	-.22	[-.49, .06]	-.12	[-.42, .18]
Sexual Anx	.14	[-.09, .36]	-.19	[-.47, .08]	-.11	[-.42, .19]
Immigrant Anx	-.07	[-.29, .15]	-.51***	[-.77, -.25]	-.67***	[-.95, -.40]
Religious Anx	.39***	[.18, .60]	-.03	[-.28, .22]	.15	[-.12, .42]
Political Anx	.12	[-.11, .35]	-.45***	[-.71, -.19]	-.31*	[-.59, -.03]
Country Anx	.35**	[.13, .56]	-.09	[-.35, .16]	-.01	[-.29, .27]

Note: † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.1:   Stepwise linear regression results among Republican participants for fusion with humanity predicting the outcomes individually (Column 1) and while controlling for other fusions (Columns 2 and 3).

On initial inspection of the left column of Table 4.1, these results might seem bizarre because fusion with humanity, an identity that ostensibly includes all of humanity, *positively* predicts hostility towards various human outgroups as measured by support for authoritarian actions and outgroup anxiety. However, these results are likely due to the shared variance with fusion with political party, which is highly correlated with fusion with humanity ($r = .62$, $p < .001$) and typically strongly predicts antisocial outcomes. Indeed, once you add fusion with political party as a covariate to control for it (shown in the middle column of Table 4.1), fusion with humanity then predicts the antisocial outcomes in the *negative* direction, with four outcomes significantly predicted (support for authoritarian actions, averaged outgroup anxiety, anxiety toward immigrants, and anxiety toward people of the opposing political party). However, once you add fusion with the US as the third covariate in the model (shown in the right column of Table 4.1), only two variables are significantly predicted by fusion with humanity (anxiety toward immigrants and anxiety toward people of the opposing political party). The loss of predictive power of fusion with humanity can be explained in part by examining the regression coefficients of fusion with the US from the same three-predictor models (shown in Table 4.2) which illustrate that fusion with the US is a stronger negative predictor of key outcomes such as support for authoritarian actions and anxiety toward people of the opposing political party.

	Fusion with US		Fusion with Political Party	
Outcome	β	95% CI	β	95% CI
Support for AA	-.52*	[-.92, -.13]	1.01***	[.73, 1.28]
Outgroup Anx	-.20	[-.47, .07]	.62***	[.43, .80]
Race Anx	-.28	[-.63, .07]	.62***	[.37, .86]
Sexual Anx	-.24	[-.59, .12]	.49***	[.25, .74]
Immigrant Anx	.49**	[.16, .81]	.42***	[.19, .64]
Religious Anx	-.52**	[-.83, -.21]	.69***	[.48, .91]
Political Anx	-.40*	[-.72, -.08]	.86***	[.63, 1.08]
Country Anx	-.24	[-.57, .08]	.64***	[.41, .86]

Note: † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.2: Regression results among Republican participants for fusion with the US and fusion with political party from three-predictor models with both variables as well as fusion with humanity entered as covariates.

Interestingly, although fusion with the US emerged as the only significant negative predictor of support for authoritarian actions and a stronger negative predictor of anxiety toward people of the opposing political party compared to fusion with humanity, fusion with the US was also the only significant negative predictor of anxiety toward people of another religion. However, fusion with humanity was the only significant negative predictor of anxiety toward immigrants, whereas fusion with the US actually predicted the same outcome in the *positive* direction. Finally, and as expected, fusion with the Republican party strongly and positively predicted the various antisocial outcomes.

I then ran the same analyses for Democratic participants. The results for Democrats are shown in Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

	Fusion with Humanity		Humanity + Political Party		Humanity + Political Party + US	
Outcome	β	95% CI	β	95% CI	β	95% CI
Support for AA	.46***	[.21, .71]	.00	[-.28, .29]	-.06	[-.37, .25]
Outgroup Anx	.29**	[11, .47]	-.04	[-.25, .16]	-.14	[-.37, .08]
Race Anx	.34**	[.12, .56]	-.02	[-.28, .24]	-.15	[-.43, .12]
Sexual Anx	.43***	[.22, .64]	.11	[-.14, .36]	-.05	[-.31, .22]
Immigrant Anx	.39***	[.17, .60]	.02	[-.23, .27]	-.17	[-.44, .09]
Religious Anx	.24*	[.02, .45]	-.07	[-.32, .19]	-.13	[-.41, .15]
Political Anx	-.06	[-.28, .15]	-.35**	[-.61, -.10]	-.25†	[-.52, .02]
Country Anx	.41***	[.20, .61]	.05	[-.19, .29]	-.11	[-.37, .14]

Note: † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.3:   Stepwise linear regression results among Democratic participants for fusion with humanity predicting the outcomes individually (Column 1) and while controlling for other fusions (Columns 2 and 3).

Interestingly, the predictive power of fusion with humanity was weaker among Democrats than among Republicans. That is, the only significant effect for Democratic participants was fusion with humanity predicting less anxiety toward people of opposing political parties, which was significant in the model that included fusion with political party, but dropped to only marginal significance when also controlling for fusion with the US.

	Fusion with US		Fusion with Political Party	
Outcome	β	95% CI	β	95% CI
Support for AA	.16	[-.12, .43]	.53***	[.26, .79]
Outgroup Anx	.24*	[.05, .44]	.32**	[.13, .50]
Race Anx	.31*	[.07, .56]	.31**	[.08, .55]
Sexual Anx	.38**	[.14, .61]	.23*	[.01, .46]
Immigrant Anx	.47***	[.23, .70]	.24*	[.02, .47]
Religious Anx	.16	[-.09, .41]	.32**	[.08, .55]
Political Anx	-.25*	[-.49, -.01]	.51***	[.28, .74]
Country Anx	.39***	[.16, .61]	.28*	[.06, .49]

Note: [†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.4: Regression results among Democratic participants for fusion with the US and fusion with political party from three-predictor models with both variables as well as fusion with humanity entered as covariates.

Further, fusion with the US shows a very different predictive pattern among Democrats compared to Republicans. For Democrats, fusion with the US predicts many of the different types of outgroup anxiety, but in the *positive* direction. This is largely the opposite pattern to Republicans, where fusion with US predicted most of the same outcomes in the *negative* direction. The commonalities between both Democrats and Republicans were that fusion with the US negatively predicted anxiety toward people of the opposing political party but positively predicted anxiety toward undocumented immigrants, and that fusion with party once again positively predicted the antisocial outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The results showed mixed support for my hypotheses. In line with my initial prediction that fusion with the US would be a better negative predictor of the political outcomes compared to fusion with humanity, I found that among Republican participants fusion with the US was a stronger negative predictor of both support for authoritarian actions ($B = -.52$, $p = .010$ vs. $B = -.18$, $p = .309$) and anxiety toward political outgroups ($B = -.40$, $p = .016$ vs. $B = -.31$, $p = .028$). However, for Democratic participants neither fusion with US ($B = .16$, $p = .259$) nor fusion with humanity ($B = -.06$, $p = .691$) significantly predicted support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing political party. For Democratic participants both variables predicted anxiety toward political outgroups with the same effect size, however only fusion with the US was significant ($B = -.25$, $p = .044$) while fusion with humanity was just marginally significant ($B = -.25$, $p = .073$). These results indicate that although the expected pattern held, in that fusion with the US was a better negative predictor of partisan animosity than fusion with humanity, this difference was more pronounced among Republicans. Indeed, fusion with the US was not even a significant

predictor of support for authoritarian actions among Democrats, which suggests patriotism may not serve as a buffer against partisanship for Democrats in the same way that it does for Republicans.

The results largely did not support my second hypothesis, that fusion with humanity would be a stronger negative predictor of anxiety toward outgroups compared with fusion with the US, both on average and toward individual outgroups (excluding the aforementioned anxiety toward political outgroups). By and large, neither fusion variable was a consistent predictor of these outcomes. The noteworthy significant effects among Republicans were fusion with the US negatively predicting anxiety toward religious outgroups ($B = -.52$, $p = .001$) and positively predicting anxiety toward undocumented immigrants ($B = .49$, $p = .003$), while fusion with humanity negatively predicted anxiety toward undocumented immigrants ($B = -.67$ $p < .001$). These results suggest that for Republicans, fusion with the US is a double-edged sword in that it is associated both with less religious prejudice yet also higher prejudice toward undocumented immigrants. On the other hand, fusion with humanity is negatively associated with prejudice toward the same immigrants, so perhaps there is a prosocial benefit of this superordinate humanity identity that extends toward non-American outgroups. However, this finding should be taken with a grain of salt, because neither fusion with the US ($B = -.24$, $p = .139$) nor fusion with humanity ($B = -.01$, $p = .955$) significantly predicted anxiety toward people from other countries.

For Democrats, the results did not support my second prediction. Fusion with humanity was *not* a significant predictor of any of the outcomes in the multiple-predictor models, while fusion with the US significantly and *positively* predicted most outcomes. The exceptions were the previously discussed political outcomes predicted by fusion with the US (support for authoritarian actions ($B = .16$, $p = .259$) and anxiety toward political outgroups ($B = -.25$, $p =$

.044)), as well as anxiety toward religious outgroups ($B = .16$, $p = .199$). This suggests that for Democrats, fusion with humanity does not provide predictive utility for prosocial outcomes, either on its own (where it significantly *positively* predicted most outcomes) or when controlling for other fused identities (where it did not predict the outcomes). In addition, fusion with the US seems to be a double-edged sword for Democrats, because although it negatively predicts anxiety toward political outgroups it also positively predicts anxiety to most other outgroups.

Finally, my third hypothesis that fusion with political party would positively predict the antisocial outcomes was supported by data from both the Republican and Democratic samples. However, the relationships between fusion with party and the antisocial outcomes were roughly twice as strong for Republicans than for Democrats, as demonstrated by support for authoritarian actions ($B = 1.01$, $p < .001$ vs. $B = .53$, $p < .001$) and averaged outgroup anxiety ($B = .62$, $p < .001$ vs. $B = .32$, $p = .001$). This suggests that although fusion with political party is a dangerous identity for any American to hold, regardless of the party, fusion with the Republican Party is roughly twice as dangerous due to its stronger associations with support for authoritarianism and anxiety toward various outgroups.

Limitations

As shown in the present work, perhaps the greatest limitation to global human identification is that it only is useful when combined with other lower-level identities. This is in line with two similar lines of existing research: identification with all humanity (McFarland et al., 2012; McFarland et al. 2019; Reese et al., 2015) and previous research on fusion with humanity (Landabur & Wilson, 2022).

Previous work on identification with all humanity (IWAH) found that IWAH predicts a whole swathe of prosocial behaviors. However, a key detail that is scarcely acknowledged is that the effects of IWAH are typically presented while also controlling for identification with one's community and identification with one's country (see McFarland et al., 2019), which suggests that perhaps the predictive power of IWAH emerges only when you control for these lower-level identities. Statistically it is possible to separate the predictive power of these various layers of group identity, but practically this may be more difficult. After all, asking a person to imagine their identification with all humanity while excluding their identification with their community or country is like asking a person to consider their love for humanity without thinking of any humans. Such an abstraction as identification with all humanity excluding any identification with the actual humans that compose the group might be conceptually possible, but is such an abstraction useful? That remains to be seen.

Likewise, existing research on fusion with humanity attempted to reduce hostility toward foreigners using a manipulation that primed either the worldwide human identity on its own or a combination of human and national identity (Landabur & Wilson, 2022). The dual-identity approach was more successful in reducing outgroup hostility. The authors suggested that this is because the dual-identity condition better preserves ingroup distinctiveness compared to the worldwide identity condition, which may very well be the case. However, the value of the dual-identity approach might also derive from the statistical necessity of including a lower-level form of ingroup identity in the model for fusion with humanity to have predictive power.

Conclusion

Taken together, the results of this study show limited predictive value for the fusion with humanity construct. Fusion with the US was a better negative predictor of the antisocial political outcomes (support for authoritarianism and anxiety toward political outgroups) for both Democrats and Republicans. This suggests that if the goal is to reduce partisan acrimony within the United States, then fusion with the US would be the identity to target.

In addition, fusion with humanity mostly did not predict anxiety toward various human outgroups in the multiple predictor models, and even positively predicted anxiety toward the same groups when it was the sole predictor. The two exceptions were that fusion with humanity negatively predicted anxiety toward undocumented immigrants and negatively predicted anxiety toward political outgroups, both only among Republicans. This indicates that perhaps fusion with humanity could be a useful identity to hold in a limited context, as it could help lower Republican dislike of immigrants and Democrats.

However, the rest of the results raise questions about whether the humanity fusion construct is a useful identity to foster, since its value is questionable if it is either not associated or even positively associated with anxiety toward various types of humans. The drawback of fusion with humanity as the sole predictor is that it suggests a person who would say something like, "I feel connected with all of humanity, but I am anxious about all these different human subgroups", which seems contradictory and counterproductive. The drawback of using fusion with humanity in a multiple predictor model with other lower-level fused identities is that it is like asking participants, "How connected do you feel with humanity, while not thinking of any specific humans you actually know?". Moving forward, fusion with the US seems like the better

identity to emphasize, especially in terms of serving the need of counteracting American partisanship.

And what a need that is. In the current study, fusion with political party positively predicted all the antisocial outcomes, and roughly twice as strongly among Republicans compared to Democrats. Fusion with the US negatively predicted most of the same outcomes, however only among Republicans. For Democrats, fusion with US seemed to partially backfire as it positively predicted most of the outgroup anxiety items. This suggests that emphasizing a national identity is only a socially positive pursuit among Republicans. However, fusion with the US did not predict support for authoritarian actions among Democrats and it negatively predicted anxiety toward political outcomes, so if the goal is just to combat partisan division, then priming fusion with the US is not counterproductive among Democrats.

Importantly, based on the data of this and the previous chapter it is Republicans who are the ones who more urgently need to become less invested in their partisan identity. As demonstrated in the current chapter, fusion with the Republican Party was positively associated with support for authoritarian actions against the opposing party at twice the strength of the association between fusion with the Democratic Party and the same outcome. Additionally, the mean support for authoritarian actions was almost a full point higher for Republicans than it was for Democrats ($M = 3.65$ vs. $M = 2.82$, $t(382) = 3.51$, $p < .001$), which suggests that authoritarianism is indeed more of a threat from the Political Right. Therefore, it is important that fusion with the US acts a counterforce to partisan fusion among Republicans, since partisanship that leads to authoritarianism is a threat to us all.

The work in the current chapter demonstrated the limitations of fusion with humanity as a construct as well as further highlighted the threatening nature of partisan fusion. However, fusion

with the US once again emerged as the strongest negative predictor of partisan hostility. Given both these findings and my primary interest in a group identity that can cool the flames of partisan division, in the following chapter I decided to run one more study to attempt to leverage the power of fusion with the United States.

CHAPTER 5: AMPLIFYING US FUSION TO REDUCE SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIANISM

The research presented in Chapters 3 and 4 showed that fusion with the United States acts as a counterforce to partisan fusion, at least among Republicans. Partisan fusion among both Republicans and Democrats consistently positively predicted antisocial outcomes including support for authoritarian actions against the opposing political party, existential threat from the opposing political party, and anxiety toward various human subgroups. Fusion with the US predicted the same outcomes but in the negative direction, for Republicans in both chapters, and for Democrats in Chapter 3. In the current chapter, I attempted to experimentally manipulate fusion with the United States to see if it would be possible to increase this fused identity, thereby increasing its prosocial utility as a negative predictor of authoritarianism.

Although the prosocial utility of fusion with the US emerged robustly only among Republicans in the previous chapters, it is Republicans who need it most. After all, the association between fusion with a partisan identity and support for authoritarian actions is much higher among Republicans than Democrats, as is their mean support for authoritarian actions. Also, although fusion with the US only predicted less support for authoritarian actions among Democrats in Chapter 3, it did not backfire to *positively* predict the same outcome in Chapter 4; rather it simply did not predict it.

Therefore, in the current chapter I attempted to increase fusion with the US using a manipulation that was successful in research by Gomez et al. (under review). I recruited an MTurk sample of both Republicans and Democrats and presented them with a between-subjects experimental manipulation with two conditions. The manipulation consisted of a patriotic prime condition in which participants wrote about a memory of a time when they felt deeply connected

to their country, compared to a baseline condition where participants did not write anything. Participants either completed the writing task if they were in the patriotic prime condition or they moved directly to the outcome measures if they were in the baseline condition.

After the experimental manipulation, I measured fusion with the US to test whether the manipulation was successful. I also included a new prosocial measure of social trust of fellow Americans adapted from existing research (Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2016). I added this measure to directly tap an overtly prosocial outcome, as the work referenced in previous chapters largely focused on antisocial outcomes and "prosociality" was defined as less support for those antisocial outcomes. I then included the three outcome measures from Chapter 3: outgroup existential threat, support for authoritarian actions toward people of the opposing political party, and affective polarization. I included these measures because they were all explicitly political and all tapped partisan division in unique ways. I did not include the measure of outgroup anxiety from Chapter 4 as it was not directly related to partisanship and I wanted the study's survey to be a reasonable length for participants. Finally, I included a measure of fusion with political party so that I could see whether it once again positively predicts the antisocial measures.

I had three hypotheses. My first prediction was that there would be a main effect of the experimental manipulation, such that participants in the patriotic prime condition would report higher fusion with the US compared to participants in the baseline condition. This prediction was based on the prior success of this manipulation in increasing fusion with one's country (Gómez et al., under review).

My second prediction was that fusion with the US would interact with the manipulation, such that the manipulation would be most effective in reducing support for authoritarian actions among participants high as compared to low in baseline fusion with the US.

Finally, my third prediction was that the general pattern of US fusion and partisan fusion predicting the outcomes in opposite directions would emerge once again. This prediction was based upon the divergent effects of fusion with the US and partisan fusion found in both Chapters 3 and 4.

I did not have any formal hypotheses about differences between Republican and Democratic participants. However, my general expectation was that once again the relationship between the fused identities and authoritarianism (both the positive effect of fusion with party and the negative effect of fusion with the US) would be stronger for Republicans compared to Democrats.

METHOD

Participants

I aimed to recruit roughly 300 American Republicans and 300 Democrats, so that after expected exclusions I would still have a robust sample of each, given that a power analysis using GPower software showed that to detect an effect of $f^2=.10$ with 3 predictors and 95% power, I would need a total sample size of 176 participants. After data collection from Amazon Mechanical Turk concluded there were 299 Republican participants and 298 Democrats. After excluding people who failed attention checks, did not take the manipulation seriously, took the survey multiple times, or took both the Republican and Democratic versions of the survey I was

left with a total of 249 Republican participants (113 male, 135 female, 1 other; ages 20-79) and 260 Democratic participants (106 male, 153 female, 1 other; ages 19-78).

Materials

Experimental Manipulation. In a between-subjects design, participants were exposed to one of two conditions: a patriotic prime condition and baseline condition. In the patriotic prime condition, participants were asked to briefly write about a specific memory in which they had a deep emotional bond with their country and felt that they were strong because of their country. In the baseline condition, participants simply did not see the writing manipulation. The full text of the patriotic prime condition is given here:

"In this section, we'd like you to remember a specific memory. Write about a time when you had a deep emotional bond with your country and you felt that you were strong because of your country. Recall this time vividly and include as many details as you can to relive the experience.

Take at least 3 minutes to write at least 200 words. Write continuously the entire time, and don't worry about spelling or grammar errors.

Please note: As stated on the MTurk recruitment page, your answers will be checked for authenticity. As part of our quality control, we will not compensate participants who do not provide authentic responses."

Identity Fusion with the US. I measured identity fusion with the US using the standard 7-item verbal identity fusion measure (Gómez et al., 2011) that I used in Chapter 4. All items were measured on a Likert-type scale from 1-Completely Disagree to 7-Completely Agree, and all seven items were averaged together (Republicans: $M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.30$, $\alpha = .93$; Democrats: $M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.45$, $\alpha = .94$). Example items included "I am one with the United States" and "I make the United States strong".

Social Trust of Fellow Americans. I measured social trust in fellow Americans using a 3-item measure adapted from an existing measure (Sønderskov & Dinesen, 2016). All questions were measured on a seven-point scale, with responses adapted to fit each item and ranging from 1 ("You can't be too careful"/"Most Americans would try to take advantage of me"/"Americans mostly look out for themselves") to 7 ("Most Americans can be trusted"/"Most Americans would try to be fair"/"Americans mostly try to be helpful"). The items were "Generally speaking would you say that most Americans can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with most Americans?", "Do you think that most Americans would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?", and "Would you say that most of the time Americans try to be helpful, or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?" The three items were averaged together (Republicans: $M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.47$, $\alpha = .91$; Democrats: $M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.46$, $\alpha = .87$).

Outgroup Existential Threat. I measured the perception that the opposing political party is an existential threat to the American way of life using the same 5-item measure adapted from Wohl & Branscombe's (2009) measure of collective angst that I used in Chapter 3. All items were measured on a Likert scale from 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree and were averaged together (Republicans: $M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.56$, $\alpha = .94$; Democrats: $M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.52$, $\alpha = .94$). The target of each item reflected the opposite political party. For example, a Republican participant would see the item "I think the future of the American way of life is under threat from Democrats" whereas a Democratic participant would see it as "I think the future of the American way of life is under threat from Republicans".

Support for Authoritarian Actions against Opposing Party. I used the same measure of support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing political party from Chapter 4, in which

participants were prompted by, "How supportive would you be if [the Republican Party/the Democratic Party] decided to take the following actions". The prompt matched the participant's own political party. Then on seven-point scales ranging from 1 (Strongly Oppose) to 9 (Strongly Support), participants indicated their support for each of the six authoritarian actions, which were averaged together (Republicans: $M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.94$, $\alpha = .89$; Democrats: $M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.71$, $\alpha = .90$). The authoritarian actions included items like "Disband Congress" and "Use the military to take control of the government".

Affective Polarization. I measured affective polarization in the same way as in Chapter 3, using a feeling thermometer that ranged from 0-100 (Iyengar et al., 2012). Participants indicated how positively they felt toward both their own political party and the opposition party. The difference between these two items constituted the index of affective polarization, with larger numbers indicated greater polarization (Republicans: $M = 41.25$, $SD = 30.91$; Democrats: $M = 48.45$, $SD = 32.80$).

Identity Fusion with Political Party. I measured identity fusion with political party in the same fashion as I measured fusion with the US, using the standard 7-item verbal identity fusion measure (Gómez et al., 2011). All items were measured on a Likert-type scale from 1-Completely Disagree to 7-Completely Agree and were averaged together (Republicans: $M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.55$, $\alpha = .96$; Democrats: $M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.56$, $\alpha = .95$). Example items included "I have a deep emotional bond with [the Republican Party / the Democratic Party]" and "I am strong because of [the Republican Party / the Democratic Party]", with the target matching participants' own political party.

Procedure

As in previous chapters, there were two versions of the survey: one for Democrats and one for Republicans. The surveys were identical except that political items were adjusted to match participant's own political party and the outgroup party. Participants who indicated that they were 18 or older and consented to take the survey were then shown a screener question asking their political party affiliation. If they gave the correct answer corresponding to the version of the survey (e.g., "Republican" to take the Republican survey) they were allowed to proceed. Participants then either completed the writing manipulation (patriotic prime condition) or moved directly onto the following scales (baseline condition). Participants then completed measures of fusion with the US, social trust of fellow Americans, outgroup existential threat, support for authoritarian actions against the opposing party, affective polarization, fusion with party, demographics, and then were debriefed and paid.

RESULTS

To test my primary hypothesis that there would be a main effect of the experimental manipulation on fusion with the US. I first ran a series of regression models with the experimental condition as the sole predictor. Then to test my secondary hypothesis and see whether fusion with the US would interact with condition, I ran a series of regression models with both variables as well as their interaction term entered as predictors. Finally, to test my third hypothesis, that the expected pattern of results would emerge once again regarding US fusion and political party fusion, I ran a series of multiple regression models with fusion with the US and fusion with political party entered as predictors. I ran these analyses separately for the Republican and Democratic samples.

Republicans

There was a significant main effect of the patriotic prime manipulation predicting fusion with the US such that fusion was higher in the patriotic prime condition ($M = 5.58$) compared to the baseline condition ($M = 5.21$) ($B = 0.37$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.71], $t(247) = 2.17$, $p = 0.031$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.01$). The experimental manipulation also marginally predicted social trust in fellow Americans such that social trust was higher in the writing condition ($M = 4.99$) compared to the baseline condition ($M = 4.62$) ($B = 0.37$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.75], $t(247) = 1.88$, $p = 0.062$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.01$]. The manipulation did not significantly predict the other variables (outgroup existential threat ($p = .199$), authoritarian actions against the opposing party ($p = .233$), affective polarization ($p = .229$), fusion with the Republican Party ($p = .379$)).

When looking at interactions between the experimental manipulation and fusion with the US, a marginally significant negative interaction predicting support for authoritarian actions emerged ($B = -0.40$, 95% CI [-0.83, 0.03], $t(245) = -1.84$, $p = 0.068$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.01$], as did a significant negative interaction predicting fusion with the Republican Party ($B = -0.29$, 95% CI [-0.57, -0.01], $t(245) = -2.01$, $p = 0.046$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.35$). Graphs of the interactions are shown in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. No other interactions were significant (ps $> .176$).

Figure 5.1:   Support for authoritarian actions toward opposing party predicted by the interaction of fusion with the US and experimental condition among Republicans.

Figure 5.2: Fusion with the Republican Party predicted by the interaction of fusion with the US and experimental condition among Republicans.

Finally, I ran a series of multiple regressions with fusion with the US and fusion with the Republican Party entered as predictors. As expected, fusion with the US positively predicted the prosocial outcome of social trust of fellow Americans ($B = 0.58$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.73], $t(246) = 7.54$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.27$), and negatively predicted most of the antisocial outcomes - marginally for outgroup existential threat ($B = -0.16$, 95% CI [-0.34, 0.02], $t(246) = -1.79$, $p = 0.075$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.06$) and significantly for support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party ($B = -0.45$, 95% CI [-0.65, -0.25], $t(246) = -4.34$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.22$). However, fusion with the US did not predict affective polarization ($p = .915$).

Also as expected, fusion with the Republican Party predicted the antisocial outcomes in the opposite direction of fusion with the US - outgroup existential threat ($B = 0.31$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.46], $t(246) = 4.13$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.06$), support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party ($B = 0.73$, 95% CI [0.56, 0.90], $t(246) = 8.48$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.22$), and affective polarization ($B = 9.09$, 95% CI [6.36, 11.83], $t(246) = 6.55$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.21$). However, fusion with the Republican Party did not predict social trust of fellow Americans ($p = .663$).

Democrats

For Democrats, the experimental manipulation did not predict fusion with the US ($p = .600$), nor did it predict any other variables ($ps > .121$).

When looking at interactions between the experimental manipulation and fusion with the US, a marginally significant negative interaction predicting support for authoritarian actions

emerged (B = -0.25, 95% CI [-0.54, 0.05], $t(256)$ = -1.66, p = 0.097, total model R^2_{adj} = 0.03). A

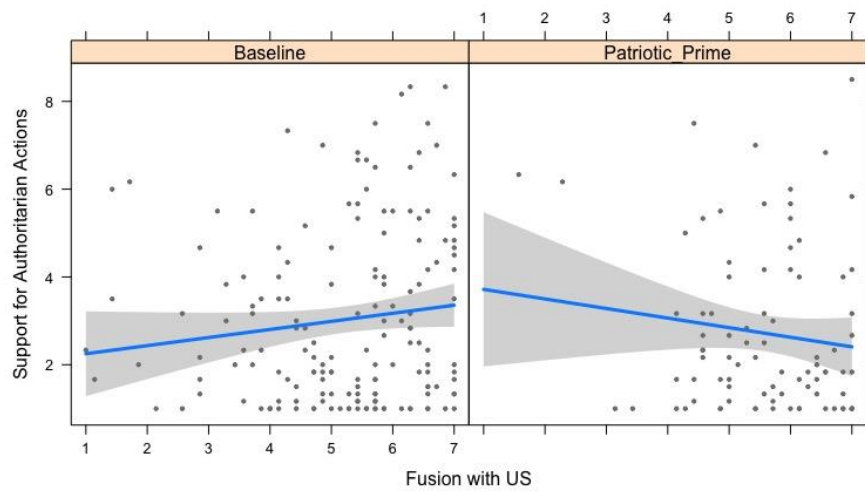graph of the interaction is shown in Figure 5.3. No other interactions were significant (ps > .331)
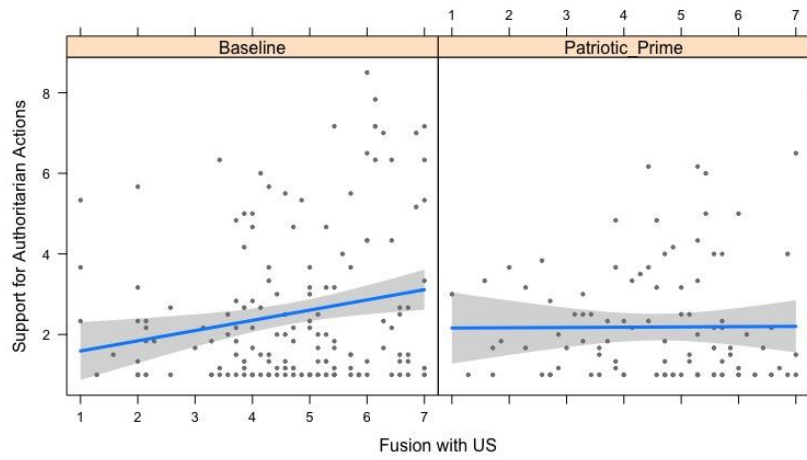
Figure 5.3:   Support for authoritarian actions toward opposing party predicted by the interaction of fusion with the US and experimental condition among Democrats.
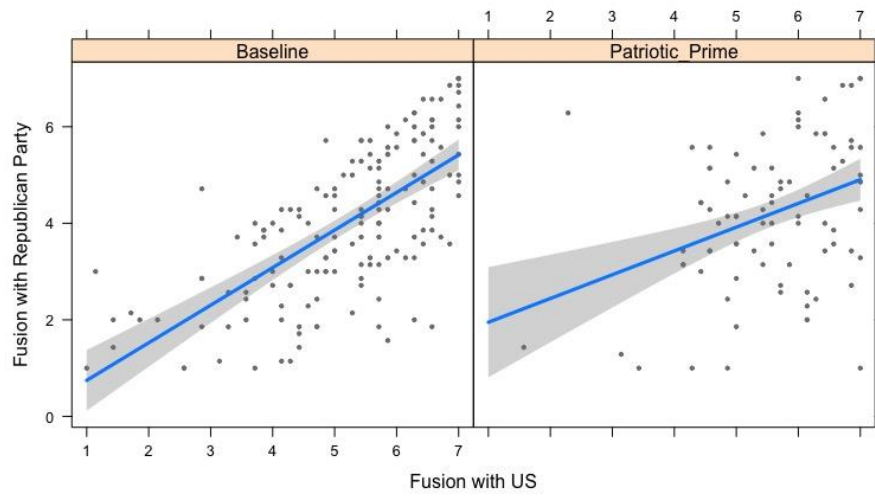
Finally, I ran a series of multiple regressions with fusion with the US and fusion with the Democratic Party entered as predictors. As expected, fusion with the US positively predicted the prosocial outcome of social trust of fellow Americans ($B = 0.44$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.58], $t(257) = 6.53$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.24$), and negatively predicted most of the antisocial outcomes - significantly for outgroup existential threat ($B = -0.34$, 95% CI [-0.49, -0.19], $t(257) = -4.41$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.07$) and significantly for affective polarization ($B = -6.00$, 95% CI [-8.98, -3.01], $t(257) = -3.96$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.24$). However, fusion with the US did not predict support for authoritarian actions among Democrats ($p = .641$).

Also as expected, fusion with the Democratic Party predicted the antisocial outcomes in the opposite direction of fusion with the US - outgroup existential threat ($B = 0.28$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.42], $t(257) = 3.92$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.07$), support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party ($B = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.35], $t(257) = 2.30$, $p = 0.023$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.03$), and affective polarization ($B = 12.66$, 95% CI [9.88, 15.44], $t(257) = 8.96$, $p < 0.001$, total model $R^2_{adj} = 0.24$). However, fusion with the Democratic Party did not predict social trust of fellow Americans ($p = .215$).

DISCUSSION

As predicted by my primary hypothesis, the patriotic prime succeeded in increasing fusion with the United States. However, it only worked for Republicans. Writing about a time where they felt a strong sense of connection to their country (i.e., the patriotic prime), increased Republican's fusion with the US. For Republicans, fusion

with the US in turn predicted social trust and negatively predicted outparty existential threat and support for authoritarian actions against the opposing party.

However, for Democrats the patriotic prime manipulation did not increase fusion with the US. Interestingly, although fusion with the US positively predicted social trust and negatively predicted outparty existential threat for participants from both parties, there were differences between parties for the remaining two outcomes. For Republicans, fusion with the US also negatively predicted support for authoritarian actions, but not affective polarization. For Democrats, this was reversed and fusion with the US negatively predicted affective polarization but not support for authoritarian actions.

What could explain the differences between the Republican and Democratic participants? Compared to Democrats, Republicans were significantly higher in both fusion with the US ($M = 5.34$ vs. $M = 4.63$, $t(504) = 5.81$, $p < .001$) and social trust ($M = 4.75$ vs. $M = 4.47$, $t(506) = 2.15$, $p = .032$). Given this, it seems that Republicans naturally feel more patriotic and also more trusting of their fellow Americans, which might explain why they were receptive to the patriotic prime manipulation while the Democratic participants were not.

In addition, there was also partial support for my second prediction, as fusion with the US had a marginally significant interaction with the experimental manipulation such that the participants who were highly fused with the US who saw the patriotic prime condition reported less support for authoritarian actions than those who saw the baseline condition. Interestingly, this marginally significant effect emerged for both Republicans and Democrats, although it was stronger for Republicans.

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Finally, my third hypothesis was supported, as US fusion once again predicted most outcomes in the opposite direction as fusion with party, for both Republicans and Democrats. As in the previous chapters, for both Republicans and Democrats partisan fusion was shown to be a dangerous and divisive identity to hold, as it predicted greater affective polarization, existential threat from the opposing party, and support for authoritarian actions towards the opposing party. On the other hand, fusion with the US negatively predicted most of the same outcomes, as well as positively predicted social trust in fellow Americans. The few exceptions to these fusions predicting the outcomes in opposite directions were that for supporters of both parties, fusion with the US positively predicted social trust of fellow Americans, yet fusion with party did not significantly predict social trust. In addition, for Republicans fusion with the US did not predict affective polarization, whereas for Democrats fusion with the US did not predict support for authoritarian actions.

Limitations

Many of the limitations of the current study have already been touched upon in this section, but they do bear repeating. First, there were key differences in effects between members of the Republican and Democratic parties. Specifically, the experimental manipulation designed to increase fusion with the US only worked for Republicans. This might be because Republicans are more responsive to patriotism by default, given their higher average fusion with the US compared to Democrats. Also, as in Chapter 4, fusion with the US did not predict support for authoritarian actions among

Democrats, so unfortunately the value of this national identity in reducing

authoritarianism seems largely limited to Republicans. This might be partly due to the

higher support for authoritarian actions among Republicans compared to Democrats,

which combined with their higher average fusion with the US allowed for more variance

and therefore a greater ability to detect a relationship between these variables. That being

said, the reasons for these differences between political parties are still unclear, so further

empirical research should explore these effects and the mechanisms that underly them.

Another limitation of the work reported in this chapter is that although the

manipulation had a significant main effect of increasing fusion with the US among

Republicans, the only other variable it impacted was social trust among Republicans,

which it only marginally increased in the patriotic prime condition compared to the

baseline. This is troubling, as it suggests that although the manipulation did succeed in

increasing fusion with the US among Republicans, it mostly did not have downstream

predictive effects on the other outcomes that fusion with the US predicts, chief among

them being support for authoritarian actions. Perhaps a more powerful patriotic prime

might be needed to directly reduce support for authoritarian actions as well as the other

antisocial outcomes.

Finally, although there were consistent interaction effects between fusion with US

and the patriotic prime manipulation in reducing support for authoritarian actions for both

Republican and Democratic participants, these effects were only marginally significant

(ps = .068 - .097). These p-values are just above the standard .05 alpha cutoff for

significance, which could suggest that either the associated effects were not strong

enough to be detected at significance with the current sample size, or that the effects themselves might be spurious. If it is the case that the effects are too weak to be significantly detected without a massive sample size, then their lack of strength might hamper their ability to be societally useful. Likewise, if these effects are spurious then they should be disregarded. That being said, neither potential explanation for the marginally significant effects is convincing to me. Given that the effects were almost statistically significant (as opposed to a large p-value like .600) and given that the pattern of effect emerged in the same way for *both* Democrats and Republicans, this suggests to me that this finding is viable. Either way, further research is needed to determine both whether the interaction effect replicates and whether there are societally important downstream effects of the interaction.

Conclusion

Once again the evidence showed that Republicans expressed more support for authoritarian actions toward the opposing party than Democrats ($M = 2.92$ vs. $M = 2.39$, $t(493) = 3.26$, $p = .001$). At the same time, Republicans were also higher in fusion with the US ($M = 5.34$ vs. $M = 4.63$, $t(504) = 5.81$, $p < .001$) and social trust of their fellow Americans ($M = 4.75$ vs. $M = 4.47$, $t(506) = 2.15$, $p = .032$) compared to Democrats. Taken together, these findings suggest that not only are Republicans the most in need of having their authoritarian impulses muted, they are also the most responsive to a patriotic prime. The patriotic prime in the current work amplified fusion with the US among Republicans, which is promising given the associated anti-authoritarian sentiment that

consistently correlates with US fusion. The replicated finding that fusion with the US acts

as a counterbalance against the association between authoritarianism and fusion with

party among Republicans is bolstered by the novel findings of this current study, where

the evidence suggested that the patriotic US identity can be bolstered through

interventions. As shown in the current study, such patriotic interventions have the

potential to interact with people's pre-existing fusion with the US to reduce their support

for authoritarianism. This suggests that priming the US identity might be an effective way

to reduce partisan division and its more pernicious outcomes, especially among those

who already have a strong psychological connection with their nation.

CHAPTER 6: INTEGRATIVE DISCUSSION

Taken together, the studies reported in this dissertation show the powerful impact identity has on our social reality. Identity fusion, a deeply felt sense of connection to a group, cause, or person, is a particularly potent force for motivating extreme behavior. A fused identity is so powerful that strongly fused people are willing to self-sacrifice by fighting or even dying for their cherished target of fusion, as well as endorse a number of extreme actions against outgroups that they deem threatening to their fused target.

The projects within the chapters of this dissertation expand upon the existing understanding of the identity fusion construct in several ways. First, Chapter 2 compares fusion to other predictors of extreme behaviors (i.e., sacred values and moral convictions) and shows that a fused identity is the most powerful motivator of self-sacrifice on behalf of a cause (i.e., gun rights/restrictions, abortion rights/restrictions). This finding supports my primary overarching hypothesis, that identity fusion is a more potent predictor of extreme behaviors in the political sphere than its rival constructs.

Chapter 3 expands on Chapter 2 by showing that although identity fusion can motivate extreme behavior, the target of fusion is important in determining how, or even whether, such extreme behavior manifests. In this project, which followed Americans across three time points surrounding the 2020 American Election, I found that fusion with

a partisan target (i.e., a political party or a presidential candidate) predicted greater

support for authoritarian actions against the opposing political party, driven partly by a

higher sense of existential threat from the opposition party. These results suggest that

political groups or candidates are potentially dangerous targets for individuals in a society

to fuse with, given the divisive nature of these political entities. In addition, the partisan

fusion effect was markedly stronger for Republicans high in party fusion or fusion with

Trump, compared to Democrats highly fused with their party or Biden. So, although

partisan fusion is potentially problematic due its association with support for

authoritarianism, the potential problem is more evident among fused Republicans.

Happily, Chapter 3 also shed light on a potential antidote to the partisan poison:

identity fusion with the United States. Fusion with the US negatively predicted support

for authoritarian actions and outgroup existential threat among both Republicans and

Democrats. Thus, the superordinate national group identity served as a bulwark against

the divisive influence of the partisan identities insidiously nestled within the national

borders and the national psyche.

Chapter 4 attempted to investigate whether identity fusion could further expand

the boundaries of group identity to a global target: fusion with all of humanity.

Interestingly, I found that although people do claim that they feel somewhat fused with

humanity, the predictive power of humanity fusion is dwarfed by the lower-level fusion with political party and fusion with nation. Although I found that fusion with humanity negatively predicted anxiety toward various human subgroups (e.g., people of another race, people of another religion, etc.) this effect only emerged when controlling for fusion with US and fusion with party. On its own, fusion with humanity *positively* predicted anxiety toward the various human subgroups, likely due to its shared variance with fusion with party. The necessity of including multiple lower-level fusion groups as control variables to pull a prosocial effect of fusion with humanity suggests that its predictive power is not a useful social phenomenon. After all, asking people about their fusion with humanity but controlling for fusion with country and party is like asking people to think of their connection with humanity without thinking of any actual humans that they know.

Although fusion with humanity was not the panacea that I had hoped, fusion with the US once again emerged as the best negative predictor of authoritarianism, but exclusively among Republicans. Fusion with the US also once again ran counter to the predictive power of fusion with party, which positively predicted support for authoritarian actions among members of both parties.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I successfully manipulated fusion with the US such that a patriotic prime increased fusion with the US, but only among Republicans. This suggests

that Republicans can be called upon to increase their fusion to the national identity

through the right patriotic priming. This is important because Republicans are

consistently higher in support for authoritarian actions compared to Democrats and

display a stronger connection between partisan fusion and authoritarianism.

In addition, in Chapter 5 fusion with the US had a marginally significant

interaction with the patriotic prime for members of both parties, such that participants

who were highly fused with the US reported less support for authoritarian actions toward

the opposing party when given the patriotic prime compared to the baseline condition.

This suggests that priming patriotism has a positive downstream effect for the already

highly patriotic members of both parties.

Taken together, Chapters 3-5 all provide supportive evidence for hypotheses 2

and 3. That is, fusion with a partisan target (party or candidate) consistently predicted

greater support for authoritarian actions (Hypothesis 2), whereas fusion with a

superordinate target (the United States) consistently predicted less support for the same

(Hypothesis 3). However, there are some key limitations to these findings that must be

addressed.

LIMITATIONS

Although the research proffered in this package presents promising pathways to pare partisan polarization, there are several limitations. Some limitations are unique to the individual projects, while others are shared limitations across many of them. The limitations that uniquely impact only one project are discussed in their respective chapter, but limitations that affect the total narrative are discussed here.

The major overarching limitation shared across multiple chapters is the necessity of including multiple targets of identity fusion in the same regression model to control for each other to be able to detect the prosocial effects of fusion with the United States. Fusion with the US on its own consistently predicted the socially pernicious outcomes (e.g., outgroup existential threat, authoritarian actions against the opposing party, anxiety toward outgroups), but in the *positive* direction. However, as demonstrated throughout the present work, when fusion with the US is included in a statistical model that also controlled for a partisan target of fusion (i.e., fusion with political party or fusion with candidate), then fusion with the US *negatively* predicted the socially pernicious outcomes, while fusion with the partisan target positively predicted the same outcomes. This highlights the importance of controlling for the shared predictive variance between these different fused identities, as the correlations between them are generally high.

The practical implications of this limitation are worth considering carefully. First, it seems that for many people their partisan identity is closely related to their national identity. This is unsurprising, as political parties ostensibly aim to improve the quality of life in their respective countries. If a person truly believes that the Republican or Democratic Party's policies aim to build the ideal American society, then it may be difficult to disentangle their partisan identity from their national one. Relatedly, if a person who is highly fused with the US believes that the opposing political party's policies will damage the United States, then it makes sense for them to endorse potentially extreme measures to oppose these parties and their supporters.

To make matters worse, politicians frequently invoke a national identity to appeal to voters. However, the nature of this national identity can range from a progressive vision built on advancing human rights (e.g., LBJ's "Great Society") to a regressive vision to restore some romanticized America of the past (e.g., Trump's "Make American Great Again"). When the main political parties offer visions of the ideal America that are in direct opposition to each other, it makes it more difficult to envision a shared common ground upon which to unite.

Another limitation that emerged across multiple chapters is that the relationship between fusion with the US and the key outcomes was weaker among Democrats

compared to Republicans. That is, although fusion with the US negatively predicted

outcomes like support for authoritarian actions when controlling for fusion with political

party, the effect size was weaker for Democrats in Chapter 3, and non-significant in

Chapters 4 and 5.

However, the positive relationship between fusion with a partisan target and

authoritarian actions was also weaker among Democrats compared to Republicans, and

the overall means for support for authoritarian actions were also lower among Democrats.

So, although fusion with the US identity was less associated with support for socially

damaging outcomes among Democrats, it is also *less needed* for Democrats, since

Democrats endorsed socially damaging outcomes less than Republicans.

Another potential limitation to the current work is that most studies were

conducted online through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The focus on online data

collection through MTurk reflects the modern practices of social science researchers, as it

is increasingly common in the field of psychology to collect data online. For example, a

2016 paper found that 45% of articles published in top behavioral and social science

journals in 2015 contained at least one MTurk study (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016). The

number of studies using or discussing MTurk has only increased over time, as evidenced

by a 2023 Google Scholar search of the term "mechanical turk" returning 532,000

articles.

There are a number of good reasons for conducting research primarily on MTurk

beyond just its wide acceptance among the research community including its time

efficiency, reliability, low cost, and high quality of data (Buhrmester et al., 2011, 2018;

Mortensen & Hughes, 2018). However, some researchers are uncertain about the quality

of MTurk data and point to evidence that data quality has declined over time (see

Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020). Others have provided anecdotal evidence that upon

stringent review of data from an MTurk study, most of the data must be excluded from

analyses (Webb & Tangney, 2022). However, the authors who provide such criticisms

offer caveats, such as the admission that long surveys with many open ended questions

may face unreasonably high attrition rates and suffer from poor data quality, as was the

case with Webb & Tangney's 45-minute long survey. Other critics acknowledge that

certain good practices can and do preserve MTurk data quality such as using response

validity indicators and careful screening of the data (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2020).

In all studies contained in the current work, I followed all the modern best

practices to ensure that the MTurk data quality was of a high standard. I made sure to

keep the surveys short (typically 5-10 minutes long, no longer than 15 minutes). I also

used screener questions or pre-screening surveys for studies where I was interested in specific samples. I included a number of attention check questions throughout each survey as well as tests of English comprehension. Finally, I excluded individuals who completed the survey in too much or too little time as well as excluded duplicate entries from the same IP address or MTurk Worker ID. Therefore, I am confident that the research presented in the current work is as valid and reliable as is possible on Amazon Mechanical Turk, which is in line with the modern best practices in the social sciences.

At this point it is an open question as to whether it is problematic for the field to rely so heavily on data collected through MTurk, as I did in this current work. That question warrants further investigation that is beyond the scope of the current work. However, it is still true that regardless of the quality of MTurk data, multiple sources of data collection are always preferable. Thus, future research on the topics explored in the current work would benefit from leveraging alternative sampling methods such as field research or nationally representative sampling.

A final limitation that was unique to the project in Chapter 2 was that it only measured an outcome measure that revolves around defending the fused cause. That is, that project looked at willingness to fight and die for a cause (i.e., pro-choice/pro-life or pro-gun/anti-gun) and showed that identity fusion is a better predictor of that outcome

compared to rival constructs. However, that project did not examine attitudes toward

supporters of the opposite stance of the chosen cause (e.g., attitudes toward pro-life

people from the perspective of pro-choice participants) nor did it explore specific

behaviors that fused individuals might endorse to advance their side of the cause or

hamper the opposing side. The later projects in Chapters 3-5 all examined more specific

attitudes toward the opposition (e.g., existential threat) as well as endorsement of specific

actions (e.g., authoritarian actions). The project in Chapter 2 also only looked at one

fused identity, as opposed to multiple. This makes direct comparisons between the work

in Chapter 2 and the work in later chapters difficult. However, this limitation is not a

major issue, as the purpose of including Chapter 2 within the present work was to

highlight the preeminence of identity fusion as one of the best predictors of extreme

behavior above other rival constructs, thereby justifying the focus on fusion throughout

the rest of the work.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEACH

The present work expands our understanding of identity and its power to

influence social attitudes and group behavior. However, there are some questions that it

raises which the present work is not equipped to answer. Such unexplored questions are

areas for potential future research.

One area of research that might be societally useful is to examine whether there are differences in predictive power between identity fusion with different types of targets, as opposed to different levels of the same type of target. Specifically, future research should investigate whether fusion with a group is tangibly different from fusion with a cause or an individual. Chapter 2 of the present work exclusively investigated fusion with a cause, Chapter 3 looked fusion with both an individual and with groups, and Chapters 4-5 only examined fusion with groups. The findings of Chapter 3 suggest that fusion with an individual, specifically Donald Trump, was more powerfully predictive of authoritarianism compared to fusion with the corresponding group (the Republican Party). Whether the stronger predictive power of fusion with an individual is idiosyncratic to Trump himself, or is emblematic of the greater psychological power of fusion with an individual over a group is an empirical question worth investigating.

Future research should also more closely explore authoritarianism among Democrats in particular. With the exception of Chapter 2, the superordinate group identities of fusion with the US or fusion with humanity *did not* negatively predict support for authoritarianism among Democrats. Although support for authoritarianism was lower among Democrats compared to Republicans and the relationship between partisan fusion and authoritarianism was weaker, even a small endorsement of party over

country is troubling. Interestingly, for Democrats fusion with the US *did* negatively

predict anxiety toward people of the opposing political party in Chapter 4, as well as

greater social trust, less outgroup existential threat, and less affective polarization in

Chapter 5. So, although fusion with the US seemed to negatively predict many measures

of partisan division, it failed to consistently predict the most troubling partisan outcome -

authoritarianism. Further research should explore why this might be, why the differences

emerged between Republicans and Democrats, and how to effectively reduce

authoritarian sentiment among the Political Left.

CONCLUSION

Altogether, the projects in this dissertation powerfully illustrate the dual nature of

identity fusion. Fusion has the power to divide a society across tribal lines of political

partisanship. Yet fusion may also hold the key to mending the divide, as a unifying force

that brings people together under the banner of a shared collective identity. However, too

broad of an identity, such as fusion with all of humanity, may be too far removed from

the daily reality of most people's lives to effectively unify people and bridge intergroup

division. Here identity fusion might face a Goldilocks scenario -- fusion at too small of a

scale like a political party might only foster further division as it excludes many people

from the group; yet fusion with all of humanity is too large-scale, as the group includes

everyone but lacks distinctiveness. Here fusion with the mid-level target of national

identity might be the case of the proverbial porridge that is just right - small enough to be

a distinctive group that is relatable to people's daily lives, yet also inclusive enough to

have predictive utility in the context of unifying Americans and moving past partisan

division. The need for such a potentially unifying identity as fusion with the United

States is great, as political parties and their partisanship have done severe divisive

damage to the US. According to my research, it is not too late for the reemergence of a

shared national identity to mend the ties that bind us together.

Appendix A1: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021)- Descriptive Statistics

Study #	Means	Standard Deviations	Cronbach Alphas
1	3.89	1.47	0.92
2	3.88	1.42	0.92
3	3.77	1.60	0.94
4	4.46	1.44	0.91
5	3.95	1.28	0.88
6	2.78	1.15	0.84

Table A1.1:   Chapter 2 identity fusion descriptive statistics.

Study #	Means	Standard Deviations	Cronbach Alphas
1	5.09	1.53	0.90
2	4.81	1.51	0.90
3	5.10	1.52	0.89
4	5.94	1.20	0.89
5	5.52	1.26	0.80
6	4.08	1.44	0.81

Table A1.2:   Chapter 2 sacred values descriptive statistics.

Study #	Means	Standard Deviations	Cronbach Alphas
1	3.78	0.88	0.87
2	3.68	1.03	0.91
3	3.72	1.00	0.91
4	4.12	0.82	0.86
5	3.94	0.85	0.81
6	3.67	0.66	0.72

Table A1.3:   Chapter 2 moral convictions descriptive statistics.

Study #	Means	Standard Deviations	Cronbach Alphas
1	1.87	0.81	0.81
2	2.05	0.99	0.86
3	1.96	0.91	0.83
4	2.28	1.04	0.84
5	2.13	1.05	0.86
6	1.14	0.76	0.76

Table A1.4:   Chapter 2 self-sacrifice for cause descriptive statistics.

Appendix A2: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021)- Factor Loadings

As can be seen when examining the factor loadings for a three-factor model, each of the three constructs strongly maps to its own unique factor, with the exception of Study 6. The highest factor loadings for each item are bolded in the following tables.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	**0.847**	0.138	
Fusion2	**0.836**	0.142	0.164
Fusion3	**0.765**	0.274	0.259
Fusion4	**0.683**	0.267	0.297
Fusion5	**0.686**	0.228	0.114
Fusion6	**0.603**	0.156	0.233
Fusion7	**0.628**	0.229	0.332
SacredValues1	0.258	0.295	**0.652**
SacredValues2	0.175	0.301	**0.556**
SacredValues3	0.233	0.274	**0.907**
SacredValues4	0.289	0.262	**0.788**
MoralConvictions1	0.241	**0.549**	0.220
MoralConvictions2	0.190	**0.734**	0.238
MoralConvictions3	0.131	**0.744**	0.234
MoralConvictions4	0.238	**0.767**	0.238
MoralConvictions5	0.254	**0.693**	0.213

Table A2.1:   Chapter 2 study 1 factor loadings.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	**0.620**		0.326
Fusion2	**0.706**	0.149	0.247
Fusion3	**0.789**	0.266	0.185
Fusion4	**0.776**	0.364	0.242
Fusion5	**0.725**	0.308	0.119
Fusion6	**0.680**	0.247	0.175
Fusion7	**0.678**	0.301	0.310
SacredValues1	0.364	0.441	**0.538**
SacredValues2	0.173	0.331	**0.612**
SacredValues3	0.377	0.351	**0.821**
SacredValues4	0.395	0.339	**0.670**
MoralConvictions1	0.251	**0.550**	0.416
MoralConvictions2	0.255	**0.746**	0.178
MoralConvictions3	0.256	**0.692**	0.323
MoralConvictions4	0.299	**0.813**	0.303
MoralConvictions5	0.263	**0.799**	0.301

Table A2.2:   Chapter 2 study 2 factor loadings.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	**0.873**	0.175	0.259
Fusion2	**0.873**	0.204	0.198
Fusion3	**0.766**	0.257	0.334
Fusion4	**0.611**	0.294	0.490
Fusion5	**0.713**	0.326	0.244
Fusion6	**0.600**	0.317	0.305
Fusion7	**0.563**	0.324	0.335
SacredValues1	0.328	0.246	**0.631**
SacredValues2	0.268	0.433	**0.464**
SacredValues3	0.278	0.306	**0.844**
SacredValues4	0.453	0.217	**0.739**
MoralConvictions1	0.216	**0.654**	0.234
MoralConvictions2	0.140	**0.843**	0.207
MoralConvictions3	0.260	**0.714**	0.153
MoralConvictions4	0.307	**0.813**	0.239
MoralConvictions5	0.248	**0.755**	0.214

Table A2.3:   Chapter 2 study 3 factor loadings.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	**0.718**	0.194	0.153
Fusion2	**0.725**	0.245	0.209
Fusion3	**0.796**	0.191	0.277
Fusion4	**0.731**	0.205	0.296
Fusion5	**0.804**	0.158	0.112
Fusion6	**0.683**	0.110	
Fusion7	**0.605**	0.228	0.337
SacredValues1	0.233	0.279	**0.617**
SacredValues2	0.215	0.288	**0.618**
SacredValues3	0.232	0.233	**0.870**
SacredValues4	0.258	0.269	**0.771**
MoralConvictions1	0.228	**0.616**	0.316
MoralConvictions2	0.160	**0.740**	0.137
MoralConvictions3	0.188	**0.664**	0.327
MoralConvictions4	0.195	**0.694**	0.301
MoralConvictions5	0.209	**0.682**	0.146

Table A2.4:   Chapter 2 study 4 factor loadings.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	**0.597**		
Fusion2	**0.723**	0.122	0.144
Fusion3	**0.857**		0.114
Fusion4	**0.809**	0.207	0.194
Fusion5	**0.729**	0.107	
Fusion6	**0.580**		
Fusion7	**0.602**	0.123	
SacredValues1		0.271	**0.809**
SacredValues2	0.113	0.123	**0.797**
SacredValues3	0.175	0.463	**0.545**
SacredValues4		0.278	**0.461**
MoralConvictions1	0.107	**0.557**	0.329
MoralConvictions2		**0.684**	0.107
MoralConvictions3		**0.590**	0.256
MoralConvictions4	0.136	**0.741**	0.205
MoralConvictions5	0.185	**0.688**	

Table A2.5:   Chapter 2 study 5 factor loadings.

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Fusion1	0.141	0.252	**0.822**
Fusion2	0.192	0.161	**0.965**
Fusion3	0.332	**0.388**	0.248
Fusion4	0.397	**0.468**	0.150
Fusion5	0.164	**0.758**	0.192
Fusion6		**0.821**	0.170
Fusion7	0.230	**0.761**	
SacredValues1	**0.710**	0.167	
SacredValues2	**0.531**		
SacredValues3	**0.761**	0.171	0.123
SacredValues4	**0.719**	0.260	0.165
MoralConvictions1	**0.450**	0.263	0.133
MoralConvictions2	**0.426**	0.199	0.144
MoralConvictions3	**0.560**		0.171
MoralConvictions4	**0.373**	0.339	0.265
MoralConvictions5	**0.439**	0.151	

Table A2.6:   Chapter 2 study 6 factor loadings.

Note that Study 6 was the one exception to the pattern, in that each of the three constructs did not load strongly and uniquely to three separate factors. In this case, Sacred Values and Moral Convictions both loaded strongly to the same factor (Factor 1) whereas as Identity Fusion loaded strongly to two unique factors (Factors 2 and 3).

Appendix A3: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021)- Variance Inflation Factors of Multiple Predictor Models

To ensure that the three primary constructs did not have problematic high levels of multicollinearity in the multiple predictor models, we ran the VIFs (Variance Inflation Factor) for each study.

Study #	Fusion	Sacred Values	Moral Convictions
1	1.55	1.70	1.65
2	1.92	2.50	2.25
3	2.20	2.20	1.71
4	1.51	1.71	1.61
5	1.10	1.41	1.43
6	1.48	1.55	1.73

Table A3.1:   Chapter 2 variance inflation factors (VIF).

Appendix A4: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021)- Single Predictor Models and Bivariate Correlations between Predictors and Outcome

Study	Identity Fusion	Sacred Values	Moral Convictions
1	0.23***	0.18***	0.25***
2	0.38***	0.26***	0.30**
3	0.22***	0.20***	0.29***
4	0.32***	0.24***	0.35***
5	0.37***	0.08, $p = 0.110$	0.31***
6	0.24***	0.09*	0.23**

*** = $p < 0.001$, ** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$

Table A4.1:   Chapter 2 main effects on sacrifice for cause in single predictor models.

Study	Sacred Values and Willingness to Self-Sacrifice for Cause	Moral Convictions and Willingness to Self-Sacrifice for Cause	Identity Fusion and Willingness to Self-Sacrifice for Cause
1	0.34	0.27	0.42
2	0.39	0.31, $p = 0.001$	0.54
3	0.35	0.30	0.46
4	0.27	0.28	0.45
5	0.09, $p = 0.110$	0.25	0.45
6	0.16, $p = 0.021$	0.21, $p = 0.004$	0.37

Note: For all correlations, p's < 0.001 unless otherwise stated

Table A4.2:   Chapter 2 bivariate correlations between predictors and self-sacrifice.

Appendix A5: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021)-
Analyses with Single-Item Measure of Sacred Values

In the final two studies we also included a single item measure of sacred values. This measure was coded as a binary value, with participants who indicated that they would compromise their value for money (values 1-4 on the scale) coded as 0 for not holding it as a sacred value; participants who indicated that they would not compromise their value for any amount of money (value 5 on the scale) were coded as 1 for holding it as a sacred value. The full text of the measure is given below, as well as analyses from each study where it was present.

1-item Sacred Values Measure:

"How much money would be necessary for you to say you give up your actual position on abortion? (you can keep that money or donate it)"
→ 0-- 0$, 1-- $100, 2-- $1000, 3-- 100,000), 4-- 100,000,000, 5 -- Never. The quantity does not matter

In Studies 5 and 6 which included this single-item sacred values measure, we ran single predictor models with it predicting willingness to self-sacrifice for cause; we also included it in multiple predictor regressions with identity fusion and moral convictions where we substituted this 1-item sacred values measure for the 4-item sacred values measure that we used in all studies. Finally, we ran interaction models to see if this 1-item measure interacted with the other main predictors, fusion and moral convictions, as well as whether this measure interacted with the experimental manipulation. Results are given below.

Study 5: The single-item sacred values item did not predict willingness to sacrifice for cause in a single predictor model ($p = 0.295$). It also did not significantly predict the same outcome in a multiple predictor model ($p = 0.557$) with both identity fusion and moral convictions entered as simultaneous predictors. Finally, the single-item sacred values item did not interact with the experimental manipulation ($p = 0.587$), nor did it interaction with fusion ($p = 0.932$) or moral convictions ($p = 0.723$).

Study 6: The single-item sacred values item did not predict willingness to sacrifice for cause in a single predictor model ($p = 0.422$). It also did not significantly predict the same outcome in a multiple predictor model with both identity fusion and moral convictions entered as simultaneous predictors ($p = 0.591$). Finally, the single-item sacred values item did not interact with the experimental manipulation conditions in which we dummy coded the self-disconfirming ($p = 0.705$) condition and the verifying condition ($p =$

0.419) against the baseline control condition, nor did it interaction with fusion ($p = 0.851$) or moral convictions ($p = 0.434$).

Appendix A6: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021) - Full Text of Measures

Predictor Measures

Identity Fusion (scale from 0 (*Completely Disagree*) to 6 (*Completely Agree*); coded as values between 1-7)

1. My position on [abortion/gun control] is me.
2. I am one with my position [abortion/gun control].
3. I feel immersed in my position on [abortion/gun control]
4. I have a deep emotional bond with my position on [abortion/gun control].
5. I am strong because of my position on [abortion/gun control].
6. I'll do more for my position on [abortion/gun control] than anyone else.
7. I make my position on [abortion/gun control] strong.

Moral Convictions (scale from 0 (*Not at all*) to 4 (*Extremely*); coded as values between 1-5)

1. To what extent do you feel your position on [abortion/gun control] is based on strong personal principles?
2. To what extent do you feel your position on [abortion/gun control] is a moral stance?
3. To what extent do you feel your position on [abortion/gun control] is morally correct?
4. How much are your feelings about your position on [abortion/gun control] connected to your core moral beliefs and convictions?
5. To what extent are your feelings about your position on [abortion/gun control] deeply connected to your fundamental beliefs about 'right' and 'wrong'?

Sacred Values (scale from 0 (*Completely Disagree*) to 6 (*Completely Agree*); coded as values between 1-7)

1. My position on [abortion/gun control] is something that I should not sacrifice, no matter what the benefits (money or something else).
2. My position on [abortion/gun control] is something which one cannot quantify with money.
3. My position on [abortion/gun control] is non-negotiable.

4. My position on [abortion/gun control] is inflexible no matter what.

Outcome Measure

Sacrifice for Cause (scale from 0 (*Completely Disagree*) to 6 (*Completely Agree*); coded as values between 1-7)

1. I would fight someone threatening my position on [abortion/gun control].
2. I would I would fight someone insulting or making fun of my position on [abortion/gun control].
3. I'd do anything to protect my position on [abortion/gun control].
4. Hurting other people is acceptable if it means protecting my position on [abortion/gun control].
5. I would help others get revenge on someone who insulted my position on [abortion/gun control].
6. I would sacrifice my life if it saved my position on [abortion/gun control].
7. I would sacrifice my life if it advanced my position on [abortion/gun control].

Attention Check Items

Correct responses are highlighted below. Multiple choice responses appeared in randomized order in the survey. Participants who answered the multiple-choice questions incorrectly or failed to rewrite the sentence in Question 1 accurately were excluded from analyses.

1) Please rewrite the following sentence in all capital letters (all caps):
Dan went to the store to buy fruit.

2) Where did Dan likely go?
   a. Grocery Store
   b. Clothing Store
   c. Furniture Store

3) What did Dan buy?
   a. A type of food
   b. A pair of shoes
   c. A piece of furniture

Question 4 appeared on its own page and its response options were not randomized, they were shown in the survey in the order below.

4) When was the last time you cured cancer?
   a. Yesterday
   b. 5 weeks ago
   c. 7 years ago
   d. Never
   e. All the time

Demographic Items

1) What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other (fill-in-the-blank appeared if participants chose this option)

2) What is your age? (fill-in-the-blank)

3) What is your ethnicity (fill-in-the-blank)

4) What country do you consider to best represent your nationality/citizenship? (fill-in-the-blank)

5) What is the highest level of school you have completed?
   a. Less than high school degree
   b. High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
   c. Some college but no degree
   d. Associate degree
   e. Bachelor degree
   f. Graduate degree

6) How do you identify yourself politically?
   a. Liberal
   b. Conservative
   c. Libertarian
   d. Independent
   e. Other (fill-in-the-blank appeared if participants chose this option)

7) How would you describe yourself?
   a. Very Liberal
   b. Liberal

      c. Slightly Liberal
      d. Slightly Conservative
      e. Conservative
      f. Very Conservative

8) What is your religion? (fill-in-the-blank)

9) How religious would you say you are?
      a. Not religious at all
      b. Slightly religious
      c. Moderately religious
      d. Very religious
      e. Extremely religious

Appendix A7: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., 2021) - Full Text of Manipulations

Study 2 Manipulation (2 conditions) –

<u>Self-Affirmation Condition</u> (adapted from twenty statements test): First participants were prompted to "Please take a few minutes to fill in the blanks in the following sentences by describing yourself. Write whatever comes to mind. For example, one way that you could complete one of the following 'I am a' statements is with the word 'student', making it say "I am a student". Feel free to write multiple words."

Then on the next page participants were told to "Please take a few minutes to describe in more detail why you chose to fill in the previous 'I am a...' statements with the words that you chose. As a reminder, in response to 'I am a' you wrote…" at which point we piped in their responses from the previous page.

<u>Control Condition</u>: First participants were prompted to "Please take a few minutes to fill in the blanks in the following sentences by describing fish. Write whatever comes to mind. For example, one way that you could complete one of the following 'Fish are' statements is with the word 'wet', making it say 'Fish are wet'. Feel free to write multiple words."

Then on the next page participants were told to "Please take a few minutes to describe in more detail why you chose to fill in the previous 'Fish are...' statements with the words that you chose. As a reminder, in response to 'Fish are' you wrote…" at which point we piped in their responses from the previous page.

Study 3 Manipulation (2 conditions) –

<u>Self-Affirmation Condition</u>: Participants in the self-affirmation condition were prompted to "Please take a few minutes to write about what comes to mind when you think about your death. Please focus on (1) the most personal goals and dreams you'll have hoped to accomplish before death and (2) the legacy that you hope to leave behind. Be as specific or general as you would like."

<u>Control Condition</u>: Participants in the control condition were asked to write about fish -"Please take a few minutes to write about fish and anything that comes to mind regarding them. Be as specific or general as you would like."

Study 5 Manipulation (2 conditions) –

<u>Personal Self Condition:</u> "Please take 2 minutes to tell us about yourself. Imagine yourself with your closest friend and your friend asks you "What makes you "you"?

Imagine your friend isn't interested in superficial qualities and really wants to know about your enduring, deepest self. "

Distractor Condition: "Please take 2 minutes to give your opinion about whether there is intelligent life in the universe other than on Earth."

Study 6 Manipulation (3 conditions) –

The study was conducted in two phases to enhance the plausibility of the feedback manipulation. In phase one we measured the three predictors (sacred values, moral convictions, and identity fusion) with respect to the abortion cause. One week later participants received an email inviting them to complete phase 2 of the study, to which they responded within 1 to 39 days. In phase 2, participants received the feedback manipulation followed by the measure of willingness to fight and die for the abortion cause. We introduced the feedback manipulation by leading participants to believe that, based on their responses during phase one, they had been evaluated by a group of psychologists who has prepared an individual report on each of the participants. Participants were told that at the end of the study they would receive the full report, but they could read a brief summary of the main findings at that moment.

Self-discrepant Condition: "In phase 1 you completed several scales. These scales provide two types of information: how you see yourself (which is reflected in the answers you gave) and how you really are (which is inferred from the time it takes to answer each question, if you changed your mind, the incongruity between the answers, etc.). Psychologists have compared these two types of information: 1) how you see yourself and 2) how you really are in five dimensions: shyness, insecurity, stubbornness, nervousness and distrust. In your case, in particular, psychologists have concluded that *the way you see yourself DOES NOT match how you really are in four of the five dimensions evaluated."*

Verifying Condition: "In phase 1 you completed several scales. These scales provide two types of information: how you see yourself (which is reflected in the answers you gave) and how you really are (which is inferred from the time it takes to answer each question, if you changed your mind, the incongruity between the answers, etc.). Psychologists have compared these two types of information: 1) how you see yourself and 2) how you really are in five dimensions: shyness, insecurity, stubbornness, nervousness and distrust. In your case, in particular, psychologists have concluded that *the way you see yourself matches how you really are in four of the five dimensions evaluated."*

Control Condition: "The system is taking longer than expected. Please continue with the rest of the questionnaire while we look for your summary."

After the feedback manipulation, participants completed the outcome measure, willingness to self-sacrifice for the abortion cause.

Appendix B1: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., under review) - Demographics Across Study Waves

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
N	1463	804	590
Proportion Female	0.60	0.58	0.57
Proportion White	0.71	0.76	0.76
Mean Age	42.38	43.86	45.89
Mean Education	4.35	4.39	4.45
Proportion Republican	0.38	0.50	0.48
Mean Fusion with Party	4.07	4.26	4.17
Mean Fusion with Leader	3.60	3.83	3.80

Table B1:   Chapter 3 demographics across study waves.

Appendix B2: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., under review) - Descriptive Statistics

	Trump supporters	Biden supporters	T-tests
N	575	923	
Fusion with Candidate	3.70 (1.81), α = .91	3.57 (1.63), α = .90	$t(1118)=1.45, p=.148$
Fusion with Party	4.13 (1.77), α = .93	4.05 (1.70), α = .93	$t(1183)=.93, p=.356$
Fusion with Country	5.64 (1.31), α = .87	4.61 (1.59), α = .89	$t(1386)=13.63^{***}$
Outgroup Existential Threat	5.65 (1.39), α = .94	5.29 (1.52), α = .93	$t(1297)=4.67^{***}$
Support for Authoritarian Actions Against Opposing Party	2.40 (1.16), α = .78	1.78 (.90), α = .79	$t(1003)=10.93^{***}$
Affective Polarization	50.87 (36.85)	52.21 (33.41)	$t(1128)=-.71, p=.479$

Table B2:   Chapter 3 descriptive statistics in wave 1.

Appendix B3: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., under review) - List of Measures

Fusion with the United States
Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.
1. I have a deep emotional bond with the United States.
2. The United States is me.
3. I make the United States strong.
All items on Likert-type scale [1- Completely Disagree to 7- Completely Agree]

Fusion with Candidate
Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.
1. I have a deep emotional bond with [Donald Trump / Joe Biden].
2. [Donald Trump / Joe Biden] is me.
3. I make [Donald Trump / Joe Biden] strong.
All items on Likert-type scale [1- Completely Disagree to 7- Completely Agree]

Fusion with Political Party
Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.
1. I have a deep emotional bond with [the Republican Party / the Democratic Party].
2. [The Republican Party / The Democratic Party] is me.
3. I make the Republican Party strong.
All items on Likert-type scale [1- Completely Disagree to 7- Completely Agree]

Outgroup Existential Threat
Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.
1. I think the future of the American way of life is under threat from [Democrats/Republicans].
2. I believe that [Democrats/Republicans] are purposefully trying to undermine the American way of life.
3. I feel anxious about the threats Americans are currently facing from [Democrats/Republicans].
4. I am concerned about internal threats to the American way of life.
5. I think that the American way of life is in jeopardy due to [Democrats/Republicans].
All items on Likert-type scale [1- Completely Disagree to 7- Completely Agree]

Support for Authoritarian Actions Against Opposing Party

How supportive would **you** be of each of the following:
1. Disbanding Congress
2. Using the military to take control of the government
3. Locking up key members of the mainstream media
4. Seeking out help from foreign governments to help win the election

5. Cutting off resources for [liberal/conservative]* cities or states
6. Personally engaging in violent protests.
The target changed to target the outgroup based on whether the participant was a Trump or Biden supporter. For example, a Biden supporter would see the item "Cutting off resources for conservative cities or states"
All items on Likert-type scale [1- Strongly Oppose to 7- Strongly Support]

Affective Polarization toward Political Parties
We'd like to get your feelings toward some groups who are in the news these days using something we call the feeling thermometer.
Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the group. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable and warm toward the group. You would rate them at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward them.

Based on the feeling thermometer above, answer how you feel about the following groups:
1. Democrats
2. Republicans
Both items measured on sliding bar from 0-100, with the numbers shown to participants

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Appendix B4: Supplemental Online Materials (Martel et al., under review) - Additional Figures
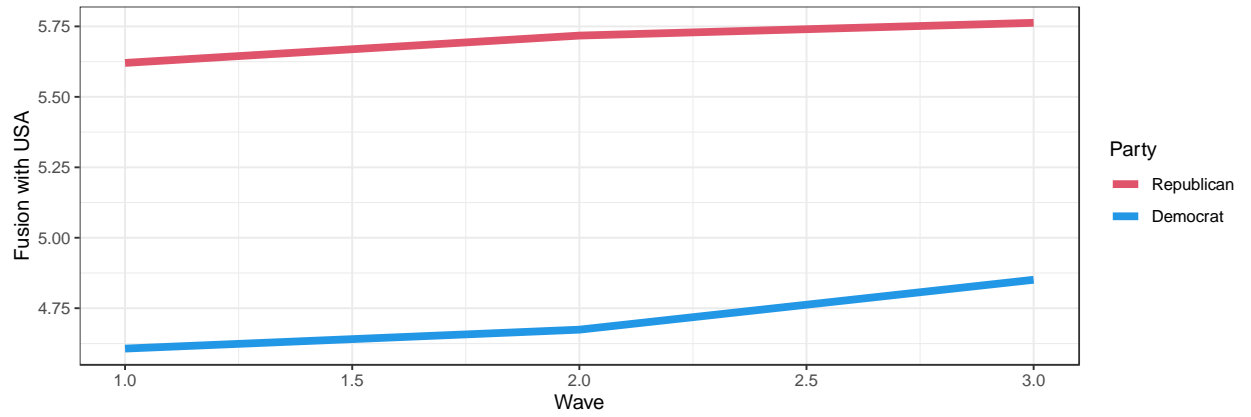

Figure B4.1: Chapter 3 changes in fusion with the US over time.
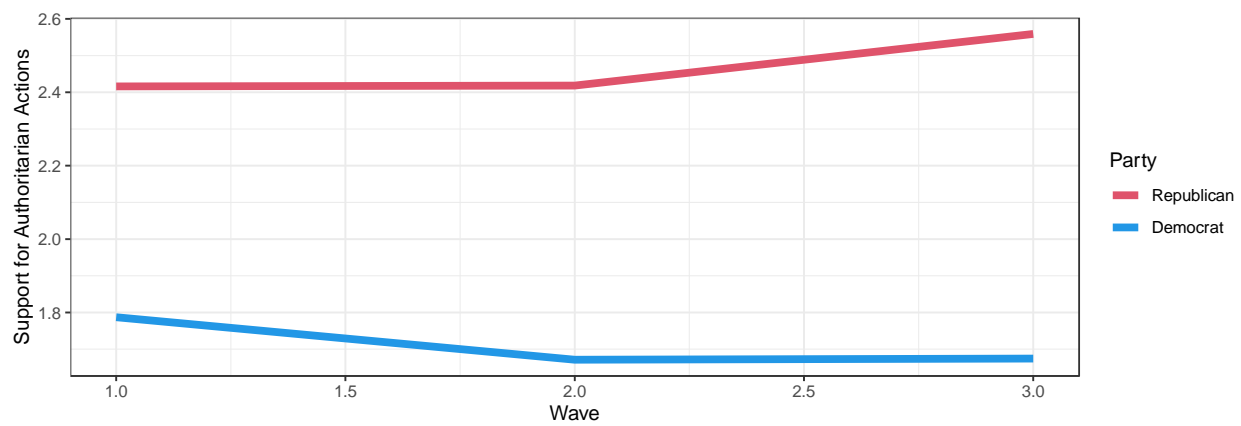
Figure B4.2:   Chapter 3 changes in support for authoritarian actions over time.
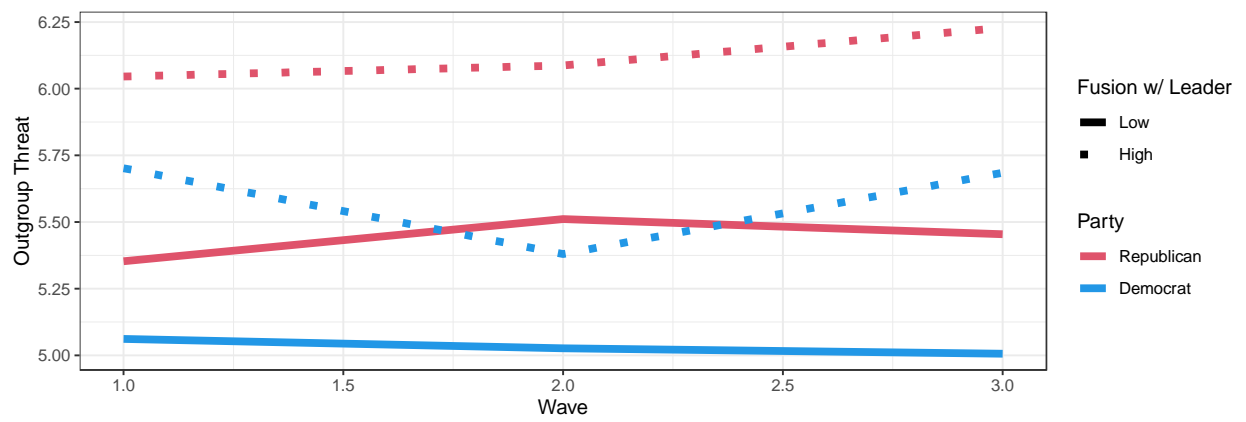
Figure B4.3:   Chapter 3 changes in outgroup existential threat over time separated by
high and low fusion with leader and fusion with party.

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