The Ideological Predictors of Moral Appeals by European Political Elites; An Exploration of the Use of Moral Rhetoric in Multiparty Systems

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The Ideological Predictors of Moral Appeals by European Political Elites; An Exploration of the Use of Moral Rhetoric in Multiparty Systems

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Moral rhetoric is a powerful tool for any politician. Yet knowledge on the actual use of political moral appeals is scarce and mostly limited to two-party systems. This study is the first to systematically investigate the use of moral appeals in formal and informal political elite communication in the multiparty systems of Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. This allows us to look beyond the unidimensional left-right axis, instead investigating the extent to which the economic, the sociocultural, and the populist dimension explain differences in moral language. The Moral Foundations Dictionary is used in automated content analyses to study the presence of (different) moral appeals in party manifestos (n = 171,639) and tweets (n = 1,130,073). The results show that West European political elites use a fair amount of moral appeals in their political communication (41.6% of manifesto statements and 33.3% of tweets). Commonalities in the usage of moral language are larger than differences. Yet found differences are multidimensional. Especially when communication is less scripted, political elites tend to distinguish themselves from opponents in their appeals to different moral foundations. Most importantly, these appeals are congruent with ideological values.

KEY WORDS: morality, political communication, moral foundations, automated content analyses

Moral rhetoric is a powerful tool used by politicians to convince their voter base (Jung, 2020). By connecting policy issues to moral intuitions of "right" and "wrong," politicians justify their actions (Haidt, 2012) and build support for their policy goals (Clifford & Jerit, 2013). Moral appeals can persuade (Clifford, Jerit, Rainey, & Motyl, 2015; Feinberg & Willer, 2015) and mobilize voters (Jung, 2020). Yet morality can also have serious democratic consequences: moral convictions—possibly fueled by (moral) emotional appeals (Clifford, 2019)—can increase polarization and decrease the acceptance of compromise (Anderson et al., 2014; Ryan, 2017; Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005). Knowledge on the use of moral rhetoric in political communication, however, is scarce and mostly limited to two-party systems (Lewis, 2019; Lipsitz, 2018; Sagi & Dehghani, 2014),[1] raising the question whether findings hold in other political contexts.

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[1] Jung (2020) does study the consequences of moral rhetoric in party manifestos in Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, and Australia. However, she does not report on these results beyond proportions.

European politicians are dealing with a mass influx of refugees and a threat of terrorist attacks while struggling to find a way to cooperate within a disintegrating European Union. In this context, some politicians make crystal clear what their position is by claiming to "save," "defend," and "protect" the nation and its traditions, calling opponents "traitors" who "destroy" and "exploit" the country. Yet the extent to which moral appeals are used by European politicians has not systematically been studied.

We investigate whether differences in moral appeals by political elites in multiparty systems can be attributed to ideological differences while moving beyond the general left-right divide (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Lipsitz, 2018). Instead, we study whether variations in moral language use can be attributed to dissimilar perspectives on the economy (as expressed in the economic left-right dimension) and/or society (as laid out in the cultural Green-Alternative-Libertarian/Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (GAL/TAN) dimension—(Polk et al., 2017)). Moreover, we explore the extent to which a third political dimension exacerbates political moral appeals, namely the populist/mainstream divide. While the distinction between the *morally* good people and the *immoral* evil elite is at the core of the populist Manichean worldview, their usage of moral appeals thus far has not been studied.

This article departs from previous research by studying political psychology from a distance (Jones et al., 2018) and explores the use of moral rhetoric in multiparty systems. We compare three countries situated in the North West of Europe: Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. These countries have developed in a similar way with regard to societal and political progress and belong to the "religious world" (Engeli, Green-Pedersen, & Larsen, 2012) which is reflected in a regular-secular conflict in the party system. The electoral systems of Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands are in essence based on proportional representation, which is mirrored in the party system containing left-wing (e.g., social democratic), right-wing—secular (liberal) and religious (Christian democratic) parties. Central to this specific study is the increasing presence of (far left and right) populist parties in each country, with varying degrees of success and longevity.[2] The rise of the populist far right and the "New Left" green parties has gone hand in hand with a restructuring of the party system along two axes—one economic and one based on cultural values (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Kriesi, 2010).

In each of these countries, we look at the extent to which six different party families moralize their political communication, by comparing the greens, the left-wing populists, the social democrats, the liberals, the conservatives/Christian democrats, and the populist radical right. In addition, we compare two text corpora to study whether moral differences are more pronounced in *direct* and more *informal* communication by political elites (Study 2, $n = 1,130,073$ tweets) than in *formal* party communication (Study 1, $n = 171,639$ statements in 107 party manifestos).

Morality in Political Elite Communication

Scholarly research on *morality in politics* can be divided into two broad schools of thought. The first starts from an a priori definition of morality. It treats some issues as moral and others as non-moral (e.g., Engeli et al., 2012; Tavits, 2007). Here, we do not differentiate between (non-)moral *issues* but instead focus on (non-)moral *rhetoric*. By making use of moral framing (Spielvogel, 2005),

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[2]The Austrian populist far-right Freiheitliches Partei Österreich (FPÖ, considered populist since 1987; Van Kessel, 2015) is one of Europe's populist far-right strongholds and has held office, while the spin-off Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (BZÖ) has been less successful. The Dutch party system holds two far-right populist parties—the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid) since 2006 and the FvD (Forum voor Democratie) since 2016—and the far-left populist Socialist Party since 1994. The German system has been familiar with far-left populism for decades (with the Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus—PDS—since 1990 and Die Linke since 2007), but the far-right populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) was only founded in 2013 and functions as the largest opposition party in parliament since 2017.

almost any issue can be "moralized" by connecting it to deeply held beliefs about what is right and wrong (Anderson et al., 2014). The moral foundations theory (MFT) (Haidt & Graham, 2007) holds that what is judged as right or wrong is affected by emotional responses that are intuitionist and innate. Five different moral foundations (Haidt & Graham, 2007) are distinguished, each serving a different, but related social function. First there are two *"individualizing foundations,"* aimed at protecting individual rights and well-being: (1) Care/Harm (sensitivity to individual suffering) and (2) Fairness/Cheating (sensitivity to disproportionality). In addition, there are *three binding foundations* that are aimed at group protection*:* (3) Ingroup/Betrayal (sensitivity to group loyalty), (4) Authority/ Subversion (sensitivity to social rank and position, (5) Disgust/Purity (sensitivity to social threats and taboos). These moral foundations are assumed to guide positions on political issues, for voters and politicians alike.

Yet recent research indicates that moral foundations are not guiding political values, but political context and ideology in fact drive moral intuitions (Ciuk, 2018; Hatemi, Crabtree, & Smith, 2019; Smith, Alford, & Hibbing, 2017). In other words, ideology is not a product of innate moral foundations, but ideology dictates which considerations are used as a basis for moral judgments. In fact, based on a causal analysis of three datasets, Hatemi et al. (2019) conclude that "moral judgments are made in order to justify preexisting social and political beliefs" (p. 789). While a test of the causal direction is beyond the scope of this article, this implies that moral considerations—whether measured in language or in questionnaires—should be in accordance with political values.

Ideological Differences in Moral Concerns

Research on the U.S. context has indeed shown that political ideology aligns with different moral worldviews. Proponents and opponents of stem cell research, for instance, place different weight on different moral foundations (Clifford & Jerit, 2013), as do Democrats and Republicans in their U.S. Senate speeches on abortion (Sagi & Dehghani, 2014). The theoretical rationale proposed by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009) is that liberals would mostly base their judgment on individualizing foundations of Harm and Fairness, because they focus on individuals as the "locus of moral value" (p. 1030). As a result, they are mainly concerned about protecting the individual and teaching her how to refrain from intruding upon the rights of other individuals. Conservatives, on the other hand, focus on the group as the *locus of moral value*. They rely more on the foundations of Ingroup, Purity, and Authority as those bind individuals into their roles in and responsibilities towards the group. However, the political space is not as unidimensional as this moral foundations hypothesis (MFH) supposes. While in the U.S. two-party system these characteristics might fit the Democrats on the left and the Republicans on the right (but see Lewis, 2019; Neiman, Gonzalez, Wilkinson, Smith, & Hibbing, 2016; Weber & Federico, 2013), in other political contexts the left and the right cannot be considered to be homogenous blocks.

Indeed, Graham et al. (2009) acknowledge that on the left communists might be more concerned with group values than individual values, while libertarians on the right generally are proponents of laissez-faire politics, and less concerned with the group as the MFH would assume. Empirical work studying ideological correlates of MFT at the voter level also hints at the importance of looking beyond the unidimensional scale. Weber and Federico (2013) distinguish between six groups of American voters and make clear that the sole focus on self-identified liberals and conservatives masks the role heterogeneity in ideological preferences plays in the support for moral foundations. Along the same lines, among Finnish voters, (economic) left-right and (sociocultural) liberal-conservative orientations are not interchangeable in their impact on moral foundations (Kivikangas, Lönnqvist, & Ravaja, 2017). Finally, the recent study by Hatemi et al. (2019) shows that—at least on the voter level—economic ideology only affects the individualizing foundations, while social (or cultural) ideology affects both.

Therefore, this article moves away from the unidimensional left-right ideological dimension and studies the extent to which differences in moral appeals can be attributed to the *economic* left-right or the *sociocultural* (GAL/TAN) left-right axis, which is also more in accordance with the two-dimensional (e.g., Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi, 2010) European party landscape. In addition, we investigate the extent to which the salient populist dimension informs the usage of moral appeals. To this end, we lay out several hypotheses following from the congruence between key political values on the one hand and moral foundations on the other.

Sociocultural Differences in Moral Appeals

The social values underlying the GAL/TAN[3] scale are closely connected to the liberal/conservative categorization in the MFH. Politicians with stronger (green, alternative and) libertarian values (on the left side of the scale) are concerned about individual rights and freedom. They pursue policy goals such as access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and greater democratic participation (Bakker et al., 2015). As the individual is their *locus of moral value,* we expect them to use more Harm and Fairness appeals, targeted at protecting the individual:

H1: The more libertarian a politician or party the more attention is paid to the individualizing foundations of Harm and Fairness.

Parties on the right side of the GAL/TAN scale are considered traditional, authoritarian, and nationalist: According to Hooghe et al. (2002), this position can be considered a reaction to perceived threats to the national community. In order to protect the community, these parties "value order, tradition, and stability and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues" (Bakker et al., 2015, p. 144). In other words, the group is their *locus of moral value*. Indeed, the studies by Hatemi et al. (2019) and Kivikangas, Lönnqvist, and Ravaja (2017) show that voters scoring higher on scales measuring a similar ideological construct indicate a stronger support for Authority and Purity foundations. We therefore expect:

H2: The more traditional a politician or party the more attention is paid to the binding foundations of Ingroup, Authority and Purity.

Economic Differences in Moral Appeals

On the other hand, the economic left-right dimension is not necessarily rooted in concerns about groups versus individuals but is focused on egalitarianism instead (Lipset, Lazarsfeld, Barton, & Linz, 1954). Parties on the economic right prefer a reduced role for the government in the economy, while parties on the left argue that the government should play an active role in the economy (Polk et al., 2017), and this active role is mostly concerned with reducing inequality. This call for redistribution would assume a focus on Fairness appeals, which is corroborated with findings by Hatemi et al. (2019) and Kivikangas et al. (2017). In addition, as those on the left of the economic left-right dimension are strong proponents of state intervention in the economy, we expect:

H3: The more economic left a politician or party, the more attention is paid to the foundations of Fairness (H3a) and Authority (H3b).

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[3]Green, Alternative, Libertarian on the left versus Traditional, Authoritarian, Nativist on the right.

Morality and Populism

This study pays specific attention to the way in which populists use moral appeals in their communication efforts. Populist parties differ in many respects, but one can make a clear distinction between those on the (cultural) right—the *populist radical right (PRR)* (Mudde, 2013)—and those on the (economic) left. The common ground of the PRR is found in their nationalist/nativist agenda, their authoritarianism, and their populist ideology (Mudde, 2013). Left-wing populist parties are also antielitist, but instead of "excluding the aliens," they "include the poor" (Van Kessel, 2015).[4] What connects populists on the left and right is their populist thin ideology: They pit the ingroup of the "good" people against the outgroup of the "bad" elite and argue that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004). The people are expected to be loyal to their "monist" ingroup: Populists are antipluralist (Müller, 2016). Moreover, the ingroup of the people is not only perceived as "morally superior" to the elite, but populists also argue that authority should reside among the people. While populist voters are not consistently authoritarian (e.g., Dunn, 2015), this reliance on authoritarianism is in line with the definition of the PRR (Mudde, 2013) and is found in studies comparing populist movements and leaders on the left and right (Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Weyland, 2013), as well as in recent work looking at the personality of populist leaders (Nai & Martínez i Coma, 2019). We therefore expect:

H4: The more populist a politician or party, the more attention is paid to the foundations of Ingroup (H4a) and Authority (H4b).

In addition, one of the important consequences of the populist moral logic is its Manichean outlook: Contrary opinions are illegitimate, as is compromise, and political conflict is *moralized* by denouncing political opponents as evil and enemies of the people (e.g., Mudde, 2004). Negativity is therefore central to the populist language. The MFD holds two lists of words on each moral foundation. One list of words recognizing the demonstration of a foundation (a virtue), with words like "unified," "safe," or "obey," and one list of words demonstrating the violation of a foundation (a vice), with words like "deceit," "cruel," or "protest." U.S.-based research laid out differences between Democrats and Republicans in their use of moral vice and virtue words (with the latter more prone to refer to moral transgressions; Lewis, 2019), but in the European context, we expect differences in this regard to follow the populist/mainstream dimension. Most notably, we predict populists focus more on moral transgressions and include more negative moral words (vice words) than mainstream politicians:

H5: The more populist a politician or party, the more negative moral words are used.

Formal and Informal Political Elite Communication

Previous studies looking into the presence of moral appeals in political communication come to diverging conclusions, even within the same (U.S.) context. Lewis (2019) studies the usage of moral foundation appeals in presidential primary debates and concludes that Democrats and Republicans most notably can be distinguished based on the valence of their moral appeals, not on the content. Like Neiman et al. (2016), studying various types of debates, speeches, and talk show appearances, he finds little evidence for language differences based in moral foundations between Democrats and Republicans. Sterling and Jost (2018) argue these results could be a consequence of the corpora

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[4]There are many differences within these broader party families, but in general one can perceive the PRR to be socially conservative (i.e., on the right-side of the GAL/TAN scale) and the populist left to be economic left.

used. While debates and speeches generally "follow the script" (as argued by Neiman et al., 2016), social media messages would be more informal and spontaneous, leading to more differences in moral appeals. Indeed, in their Twitter study, they find quite some differences between liberal and conservative politicians.

These findings suggest that differences in moral appeals might not only be dependent upon ideological differences, but that the medium might play an important role. In this study, we therefore pit the most scripted, partisan texts, party manifestos, against the least scripted political texts: MP's tweets. Party manifestos, like the Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) studied by Walter (2020), "are completely controlled and officially approved by the party leadership and therefore provide a reliable source" (p. 160) to measure the ideological party line. Party manifestos are a product of extensive deliberation, especially within established parties, and often present a compromise, also language wise. This might be reflected in a deemphasis of distinctive moral values, also in order to appeal to the median voter (Lipsitz, 2018; Motyl, 2012).

On the other hand, Twitter is a forum for political communication that is much more centered around the politician, instead of the party, and can be used for continuous dialogue with the voter (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).[5] Unless their account is completely taken over by communication professionals, MPs are able to tweet what's on their hearts and minds. As is convincingly argued by Frimer (2020, p. 2), what is uttered spontaneously on Twitter should correspond with individuals' characteristic thoughts and even "their stable personalities." Whether or not morality follows ideology or vice versa, this should lead to a stronger connection between ideology and moral language in tweets (also in line with Sterling & Jost, 2018). We therefore expect:

H6: Ideological differences in moral appeals are larger in tweets than in party manifestos.

STUDY 1

Methods

To study the use of moral rhetoric in *formal political elite communication,* we used the corpus of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Krause et al., 2018) and downloaded the annotated texts (csv files) of 16 elections (see Table 1). In the CMP, the manifestos were unitised into quasis-entences, containing exactly one statement or message. This resulted in 171,639 statements. All data were preprocessed in Python, making use of its Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) (Bird, Klein, & Loper, 2009) to remove stopwords and punctuation marks from the text.

Measures

Moral Foundations

To estimate the presence of moral foundations in political elite appeals, we used the Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD; Graham et al., 2009).[6] Using a dictionary-based approach in Python has two main advantages: It connects to previous research and can easily be applied to both tweets and manifestos. The MFD holds 11 lists of words, for each foundation two words (a positive "virtue" and a negative "vice") and a list of general moral words. Some words are assigned to more than one

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[5]Twitter is more actively used by politicians than other social network sites such as Facebook (Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014).
[6]The dictionary was designed for use in the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count program (LIWC) and adapted to Python, making use of regular expressions (re module).

Table 1. Overview of Elections and Parties

Elections	Parties
Austria 1999	FPÖ, Grüne, ÖVP, SPÖ
Austria 2002	FPÖ, Grüne, ÖVP, SPÖ
Austria 2006	FPÖ, Grüne, ÖVP, SPÖ, BZÖ
Austria 2008	FPÖ, Grüne, ÖVP, SPÖ, BZÖ
Austria 2013	FPÖ, Grüne, ÖVP, SPÖ, NEOS, Team Stronach
Austria 2017	FPÖ, Grüne, ÖVP, SPÖ, NEOS, Liste Pilz
Germany 1998	CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Grüne, PDS,
Germany 2002	CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Grüne, PDS,
Germany 2005	CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Grüne, PDS
Germany 2009	CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Grüne, Linke
Germany 2013	CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Grüne, Linke, AfD
Germany 2017	CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Grüne, Linke, AfD
The Netherlands 2006	CDA, PvdA, VVD, GroenLinks, D66, PVV, Christenunie, PvdD, SGP, SP, 50Plus
The Netherlands 2010	CDA, PvdA, VVD, GroenLinks, D66, PVV, Christenunie, PvdD, SGP, SP, 50Plus
The Netherlands 2012	CDA, PvdA, VVD, GroenLinks, D66, PVV, Christenunie, PvdD, SGP, SP, 50Plus
The Netherlands 2017	CDA, PvdA, VVD, GroenLinks, D66, PVV, Christenunie, PvdD, SGP, SP, 50Plus, DENK, FvD

list. The MFD was translated to Dutch and German. The dictionaries were systematically tested and refined by removing too generic words and adding more specific words to enhance accuracy. To further validate the dictionaries, we extracted a random sample of 100 German and Dutch manifesto lines from our sample and qualitatively coded these by hand, assessing the substantive presence of each moral foundation. This way, we are able to establish whether the identification and classification of content into the 11 categories worked equally well using a human coder versus machine coding. After the finalization of the human coding, for each dictionary, each manifesto line was categorized as either (1) true positive (TP)—case was coded positive by hand and categorized positive by the dictionary, (2) true negative (TN)—case was negative and categorized negative, (3) false positive (FP)—case was negative but categorized positive, or (4) false negative (FN)—case was positive but categorized negative. The validation check indicates that the classification by human coders resulted in similar findings as the machine coding, as shown in Table S4.1 in the online supporting information.[7]

Each word in each string of text was automatically coded for presence in the dictionary, making use of regular expressions. For each moral foundation, a dichotomous variable was computed, indicating the absence/presence of said moral foundation, collapsing negative (vice) and positive (virtue) words ($M_{\text{HarmManifestos}} = 0.18$[8]; $M_{\text{FairnessManifestos}} = 0.11$; $M_{\text{IngroupManifestos}} = 0.12$; $M_{\text{AuthorityManifestos}} = 0.12$; $M_{\text{PurityManifestos}} = 0.06$). Three composite scores were used in the analyses. First, the propensity to moralize was calculated by computing a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of either one of the moral foundations or of general moral words ($M_{\text{P(Moralize)Manifestos}} = 0.42$). In addition, a dummy variable was constructed to denote the presence of virtue words ($M_{\text{VirtueManifestos}} = 0.34$) and a second one signaling vice words ($M_{\text{ViceManifestos}} = 0.12$).

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[7]Example excerpts can be found in Appendix S5 in the online supporting information.
[8]These means denote the average proportion of a specific appeal in manifesto statements, or, in other words, the percentage of statements including a specific appeal. For example, 18.0% of the manifesto statements included a Harm appeal.

Ideology

To study the extent to which moral appeals are affected by ideological differences, we first distinguish between different party families. Based on the categorization of the CMP, we distinguish between (1) green parties (dubbed ecological by the CMP), (2) social democratic parties, (3) liberal parties, and (4) Christian and conservative parties (the two families are lumped together in this analysis[9]). That leaves us with a number of parties considered socialist (the German PDS/Die Linke and the Dutch Socialist Party[10]) by the Manifesto Project, but populist far left by populism scholars (Rooduijn et al., 2019). The same holds for parties dubbed nationalist by the Manifesto Project (the Austrian FPÖ and BZÖ, the Dutch PVV and FvD, and the German AfD), and populist far right by Rooduijn et al. (2019). Here we follow the latter, adding two more party families: (5) the left-wing populists and (6) the right-wing populists. The remaining parties, dubbed single issue parties by the Manifesto Project, are included in the analyses but not as a separate party family.[11] An overview of parties included in the analysis is given in Table 1.

Additionally, we make use of the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017), in which experts placed all parties under study on the general left-right scale, the economic left-right scale, and the GAL/TAN scale (all measured on a scale from 0 "left" to 10 "right"). Based on election year and party, the expert survey scores were merged with the coded manifesto data.[12]

Controls

In the analyses, we control for several variables. First of all, we automatically assessed the length, measured in number of words, of each manifesto statement after preprocessing ($M = 75.97$ $SD = 44.83$). In addition, since the use of moral words is closely related to valence, we also control for sentiment. We coded the sentiment of all statements using SentiStrength, denoting the number of positive and negative words per statement ($M_{Positive} = 1.23$, $SD_{Positive} = 0.48$; $M_{Negative} = 1.19$, $SD_{Negative} = 0.55$). SentiStrength is an opinion-mining algorithm created to identify and assess sentiment-related information and polarity (positive/negative) of social web data (Thelwall, Buckley, Paltoglou, Cai, & Kappas, 2010). The algorithm accounts, for example, for the mood of the text, slang, and negating words (Thelwall & Buckley, 2013).[13] Finally, we control for the party's power in the system by adding a dummy indicating whether the party is part of the government (leading up the elections, thus while compiling the manifesto).

Results

We first glance over the extent to which different party families use different moral appeals. Figure 1 first shows the overall mean proportion of moral appeals in manifestos per party family, followed by the attention for specific foundations and positive and negative moral appeals. The results make clear that all party families moralize, the extent to which more or less decreases from left to right. This is corroborated by a one-way ANOVA ($F_{5, 165861} = 125.970$, $p > .000$): the Greens, social democrats, and the left-wing populists moralize significantly more than the liberals, the

[9]Since the Manifesto Project only stored the CDU/CSU manifestos as annotated csv-files, we treat the CDU/CSU as one party, meaning that in the second study, politicians belonging to either of the parties are considered as belonging to both.
[10]We do not take into account the manifesto of the Austrian Communist Party—only competing in the 2008 national elections.
[11]This drops 5772 statements from the dataset in the analyses comparing party families.
[12]Since no survey was available for the Austrian 2017 election, the 2013 values were used.
[13]We used the adjusted SentiStrength versions for Dutch and German language. For more information, see http://sentistrength. wlv.ac.uk/
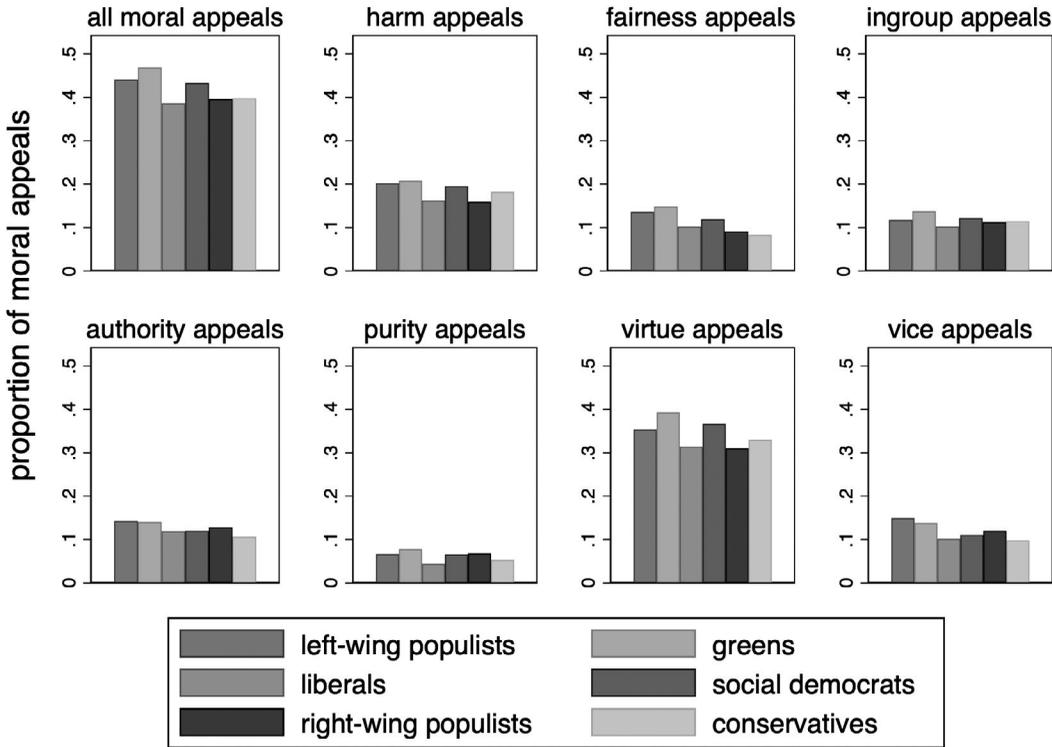
Figure 1. Proportion of moral appeals in manifesto statements by party family. *N* = 165,867. Bars represent proportion of statements in manifestos of each party family containing a moral appeal.

conservatives, and the right-wing populists. In line with previous research (Schein & Gray, 2015), moral references to Care/Harm are the most prominent for all parties. While there certainly are differences between party families, Fairness, Ingroup, and Authority appeals take a second place, and Purity appeals receive the least attention, again in line with previous findings (Lewis, 2019). Finally, the overwhelming majority of the moral words used refer to virtues.

While these descriptive analyses give a clear overview of the popularity of certain moral appeals in specific party families, multivariate analyses are needed to support or reject the proposed hypotheses regarding ideological differences. Figure 2 plots the results of 32 different logistic regression analyses, regressing different moral appeals on the respective party's position on (1) the general left-right dimension, (2) the economic left-right dimension, (3) the cultural GAL/TAN dimension, and finally on (4) the categorization of the party as populist. We control for length of the manifesto statement, year, country, sentiment, and government membership.

Overall, the plots show that manifestos are more similar than dissimilar, with only seven out of 32 coefficients significantly differing from zero. This is relatively little, considering the high statistical power. Interestingly, a comparison of the four plots does indicate that studying only the left-right axis (top left plot) obfuscates the fact that differences in moral appeals are multidimensional. There are, however, no ideological explanations for the attention parties devote to moral appeals in general, appeals to Harm, Ingroup, Authority, and positive moral appeals.
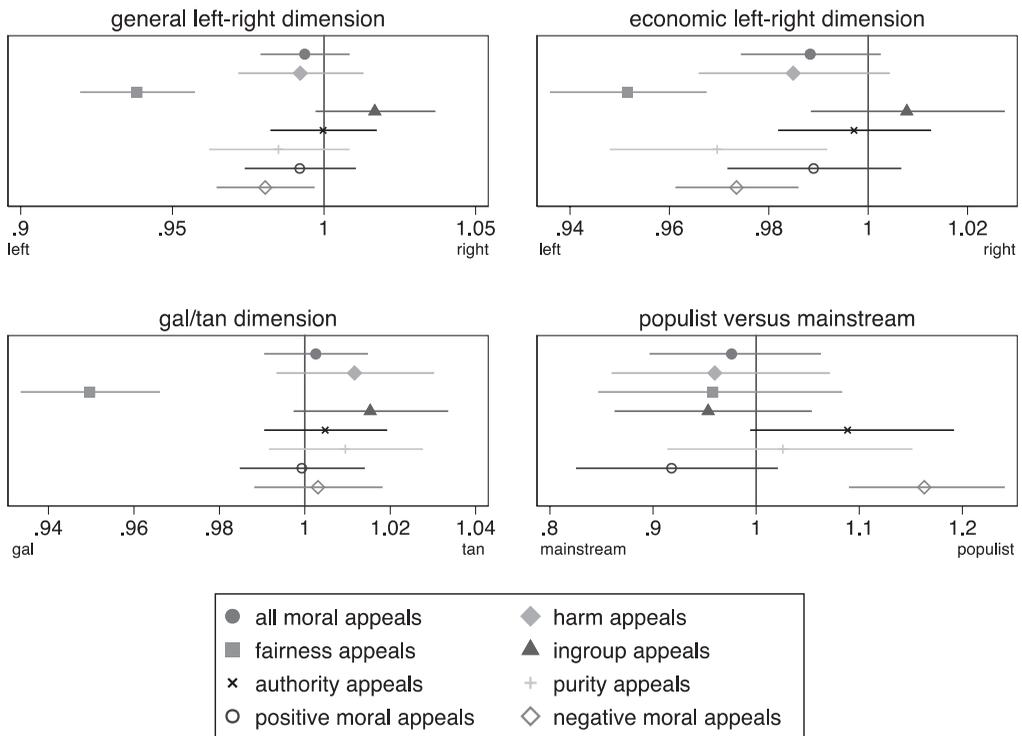
Figure 2. Moral appeals in manifesto statements by ideological dimensions. $N = 171{,}639$. Results of logistic regression analyses with robust standard errors clustered around manifestos. Coefficients are odds ratios, representing the likelihood of a manifesto statement containing a (specific) moral appeal dependent upon the party's position on each of the four dimensions. Controlled for length of manifesto, country fixed effects, year, sentiment, and government participation.

Moving on to our hypotheses, Hypotheses 1 can therefore only partially be corroborated: *H1*: Parties on the sociocultural—libertarian—left are more likely to use Fairness appeals, but not more likely to use Harm appeals. If a party moves 1 point to the right on the GAL/TAN scale (and thus is more traditional), the probability that their manifesto statement contains a fairness word decreases by 0.95 times, meaning the odds decrease by 5%. Yet, Hypothesis 2 finds no support in the data, and Hypothesis 3 finds mixed support: *H3a*: Parties on the economic left are, as expected, more likely to use Fairness appeals (and the odds ratio is again 0.95). *H3b*: Parties on the economic left are not more likely to use Authority appeals. (We do, however, see that they use more appeals to Purity and more negative moral appeals.)

Moving on to the populist dimension, the large standard errors in the fourth plot of Figure 2 indicate that on this final dimension variation between parties in each category is much larger.[14] This results in only one consistent distinction between populist parties and mainstream parties (H5) which is their preference for negative moral appeals. A manifesto statement from a populist party is 1.16 times more likely to contain a negative moral word than a manifesto statement from a mainstream party. However, the content of their moral appeals (H4 laid out the expectation that populists used more Ingroup and Authority appeals) does not differ from mainstream parties. Distinguishing

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[14]In addition, the large standard errors can be a result of the lower sample size of populist parties.

between left- and right-wing populists (Appendix S3 in the online supporting information) shows that the underrepresentation of Ingroup moral references can be attributed to the low score of left-wing populist parties. Yet, right-wing populist parties also do not use significantly more Ingroup appeals than mainstream parties. The only consistent distinction between populist parties and mainstream parties (H5) is their preference for negative moral appeals. A manifesto statement from a populist party is 1.16 times more likely to contain a negative moral word than a manifesto statement from a mainstream party.

The country analyses (Appendix S1.1–3 in the online supporting information) show that the only result that is consistent between the three countries under study is the left-wing bias, on the economic axis, towards moral Fairness appeals. However, as noted, political communication in manifestos may be more scripted (Lewis, 2019) than communication in other outlets. We now turn our attention to the possibly more spontaneous usage of political moral appeals in tweets.

STUDY 2

Tweets

Tweepy in Python 3 was used for gathering the last 3200 tweets of each Member of Parliament active on Twitter in all three countries.[15] This resulted in 681.996 tweets from Germany, 76.727 tweets from Austria, and 371.350 tweets from the Netherlands. In total, more than 1.1 million tweets posted between 2010 and 2018 from 24 different political parties[16] were gathered. Again, all data were preprocessed in Python, making use of NLTK.

Measures

Moral Foundations

The Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD) was used (as described in Study 1) on the cleaned tweets using Python. A validation test was conducted in the same manner as for the manifesto statements, coding 100 random tweets per language by hand. The results were satisfactory and can be found in Table S4.1 in the online supporting information. For each moral foundation, a dichotomous variable was computed, indicating the absence/presence of said moral foundation, collapsing negative (vice) and positive (virtue) words ($M_{\text{HarmTweets}} = 0.12$; $M_{\text{FairnessTweets}} = 0.07$; $M_{\text{IngroupTweets}} = 0.09$; $M_{\text{AuthorityTweets}} = 0.08$; $M_{\text{PurityTweets}} = 0.08$). Three composite scores were used in the analyses. First, the propensity to moralize was calculated by computing a dichotomous variable indicating the presence of either one of the moral foundations or general moral words ($M_{\text{P(Moralize)Tweets}} = 0.33$). In addition, a dummy variable was constructed to denote the presence of virtue words ($M_{\text{VirtueTweets}} = 0.25$) and a second one signaling vice words ($M_{\text{ViceTweets}} = 0.11$).

Ideology

Party family categorization followed the same logic as in Study 1. The 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk et al., 2017) was used to assess the partisan position on the general left-right scale, the economic left-right scale, and the GAL/TAN scale (all measured on a scale from 0 to 10). Populism

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[15]In Germany, 428 out of 709 Bundestag members are active on Twitter, in the Netherlands 144 of 150, and in Austria 69 out of 61 Federal and 183 National Council members are active Twitter users.
[16]NL: VVD, PVV, DENK, PvdA, PvdD, CDA, FvD, CU, GL, SGP, D66, 50Plus, SP; GER: CSU/CDU, SPD, AfD, Linke, Grüne; AUT: ÖVP, FPÖ, SPÖ, Grüne, NEOS, Liste Pilz.

was measured using antielite salience—measuring the salience of antiestablishment and antielite rhetoric on an 11-point scale.[17] Based on the MP's party, the expert survey scores were merged with the coded tweets.

Controls

Tweepy was used to code the length of a tweet (number of characters; $M = 66.26$, $SD = 25.92$), the date of the tweet, whether the tweet was a retweet ($M = 0.40$), and whether it included a quote ($M = 1.11$). Based on the date variable, we added a dummy variable indicating whether the tweet was published after November 7, 2017, when the maximum number of characters was doubled from 140 to 280 ($M = 0.38$). Mirroring Study 1, we included the number of negative ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 0.65$) and positive ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 0.61$) sentiment words in each tweet using SentiStrength for Dutch and German language. Again, we control for the party's power in the system by adding a dummy indicating whether the party is part of the government.

Results

We first look at the usage of different types of moral appeals by the different party families (Figure 3). In line with the manifesto results, we see that liberals moralize the least. While in formal political elite communication there appeared to be a decline from left to right, in informal communication, all other party families appear to use moral language to a similar extent. In line with Study 1 again, Harm appeals are used the most by all parties, and moral appeals are mostly positive.

To investigate the extent to which the different types of appeals vary between ideological dimensions, we conduct multivariate analyses regressing the presence of a moral appeal on the respective party's position on (1) the general left-right dimension, (2) the economic left-right dimension, (3) the cultural GAL/TAN dimension,[18] and on (4) the categorization of the party as populist, measured here as antielite salience.

Figure 4 shows that, compared to manifestos, the morality of tweets is much more affected by ideological differences: Of the 32 relevant coefficients, 23 differ significantly from zero.[19] Again, studying only the left-right axis (top left plot) would lead to substantially different conclusions on the ideological correlates of political moral appeals. Yet, like in party manifestos, Hypothesis 1 is only partially supported: The libertarian left is more likely to use Fairness appeals but not more likely to use Harm appeals. Instead, the latter are more present among traditional politicians. Hypothesis 2 can be fully corroborated: traditional, authoritarian, nativist (TAN) politicians use more appeals based on binding foundations: appeals to Ingroup, Purity, and Authority. Hypothesis 3 is also corroborated: Politicians on the economic left are more willing to use appeals to Fairness (H3a) and Authority (H3b), as are Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5: Populist politicians use more appeals to Ingroup and Authority and more negative moral appeals.[20,21,22]

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[17]This scale could not be used in Study 1 because of limited data availability.

[18]Party positioning is based on the Chapel Hill expert survey using the 2014 data, as the 2017 flash survey was not conducted in Austria.

[19]This, of course, also is a consequence of the large power.

[20]A robustness check shows that logistic regression analyses in which all three dimensions are added as explanatory variables generates similar results, except for one: the finding that traditional parties use more vice words.

[21]While Figure 4 indicates the antielitist dimension also positively affects the presence of moral ingroup appeals, this finding is not robust (see Appendix S3.2 in the online supporting information) when regressed on party type as in Study 1.

[22]The overrepresentation of Harm and Authority appeals hold up in a robustness check comparing between (general) left and right, that is, both on the left and on the right politicians from parties scoring higher on the antielitist dimension use more Harm and Authority appeals.
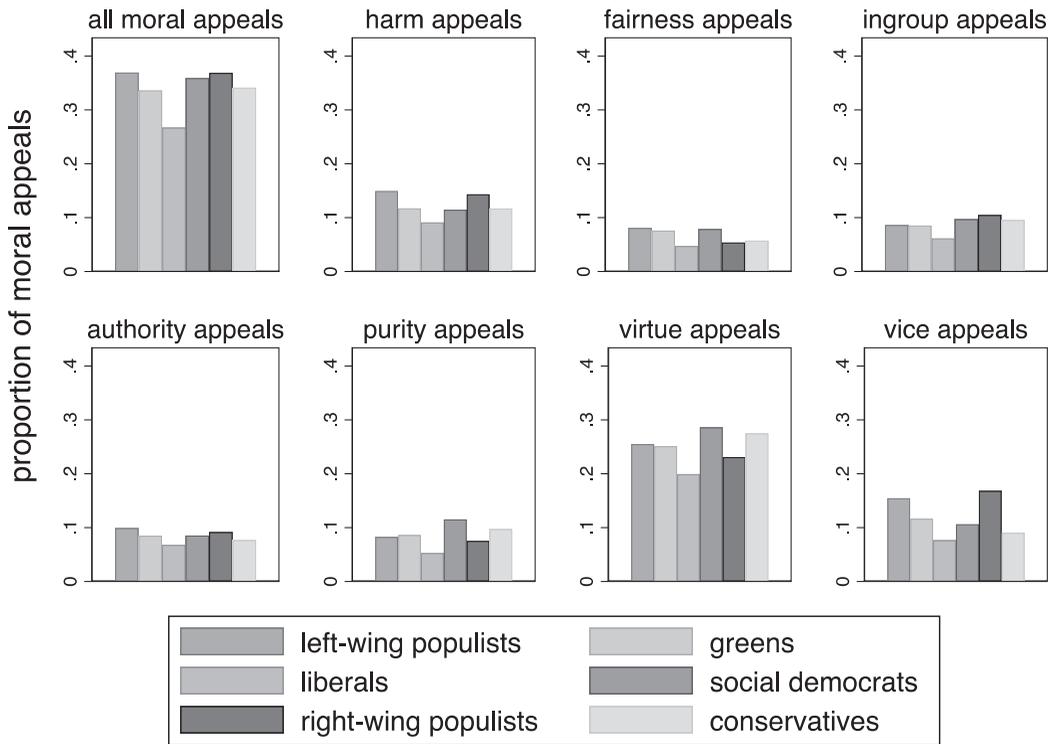
Figure 3. Proportion of moral appeals in tweets by party family. $N = 1,130,073$. Bars represent proportion of tweets by politicians in each party family containing a moral appeal.

It has to be noted that these aggregate results mask the fact that there are quite a few differences between countries (Appendix S2.1–3 in the online supporting information), mainly due to divergent Austrian results. Among Austrian politicians, the studied dimensions are clearly less useful in explaining differences in moral appeals, exemplified by the very large standard errors. Only Hypothesis 2 and 5 can be partially corroborated. If we limit ourselves to comparing German and Dutch MP's tweets, we find more consistent results.

Comparing Manifestos and Tweets

Now we return to the comparison of the results of Study 1 and 2. On first sight, the comparison of Figures 2 and 4 seems to support Hypothesis 6, which expected ideological differences in moral appeals to be more pronounced in tweets than in manifestos. However, we need to look at the substantive effect sizes to draw conclusions here.

If we do so we see that, indeed, differences seem to be more pronounced if we look at the positive impact of the sociocultural GAL/TAN dimension on the likelihood of publishing a tweet containing a binding Ingroup appeal ($OR_{tweets} = 1.040$ (95% CI: 1.028, 1.053); $OR_{manifestos} = 1.015$ (95% CI: .997, 1.034)) and a binding Purity appeal ($OR_{tweets} = 1.022$ (95% CI: 1.007, 1.037); $OR_{manifestos} = 1.009$ (95% CI: .992, 1.028)). However, the probability of finding a binding Authority appeal for tweets might increase significantly with a 1-point increase on the GAL/TAN scale, while no such difference in probabilities is found for manifesto statements; the odds ratios do not substantially differ that much ($OR_{tweets} = 1.010$ (95% CI: 1.000, 1.019); $OR_{manifestos} = 1.005$ (95% CI: .991, 1.019)). Moreover, the
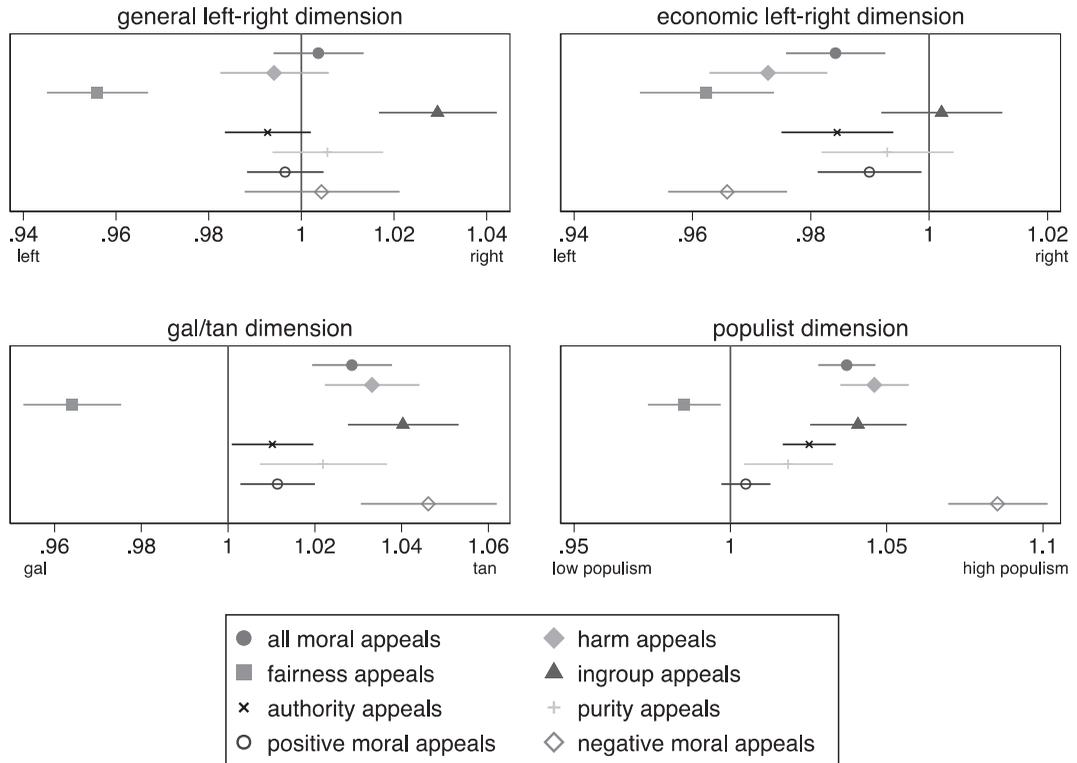
Figure 4. Moral appeals in tweets by ideological dimensions. $N = 1,083,593$. Logistic regression analysis with robust standard errors clustered around accounts. Coefficients are odds ratios. Controlled for length of tweet, whether the tweet is a quote or a retweet, country fixed effects, date, sentiment, and government participation.

preference for Fairness appeals on the sociocultural and economic left seems to be stronger in manifestos than in tweets (GAL/TAN: $OR_{tweets} = 0.964$ (95% CI: .964, .975); $OR_{manifestos} = 0.950$ (95% CI: .934, .966); Economic left-right: $OR_{tweets} = 0.962$ (95% CI: .951, .974); $OR_{manifestos} = 0.952$ (95% CI: .936, .967)).

What we do see is that the impact of the populist/mainstream axis on the hypothesized foundations is stronger in tweets than in manifestos. Focusing only on the populist/mainstream division (plot 4 in Figure 2 and plot C2 in the online supporting information) differences are more pronounced for Ingroup appeals ($OR_{tweets} = 1.140$ (95% CI: 1.060, 1.226); $OR_{manifestos} = 0.954$ (95% CI: .863, 1.054)), Authority appeals ($OR_{tweets} = 1.145$ (95% CI: 1.087, 1.206); $OR_{manifestos} = 1.089$ (95% CI: .994, 1.192)), and most notably negative moral appeals ($OR_{tweets} = 1.489$ (95% CI: 1.387, 1.600); $OR_{manifestos} = 1.163$ (95% CI: 1.090, 1.241)). Taking it all together, this means that Hypothesis 6 is only partially supported. It is regarding the expectations as laid out in Hypotheses 2, 4, and 5, but not in Hypothesis 1: There, the results are stronger in manifestos. For Hypothesis 3, results are conflicting: The impact of the economic left-right axis on Fairness appeals is stronger in manifestos, while the impact on Authority appeals is stronger in tweets.

Discussion

This article set out to study the extent to which European political elites use moral appeals in their communication efforts and looked into scripted party manifestos as well as spontaneous political communication in tweets. The findings show that European political elites use many moral

appeals—in 41.6% of their manifesto statements and in 33.3% of their tweets.[23] While the focus of the article is on discerning ideological explanations for the usage of moral appeals, one of the main conclusions of the article is that all parties and all politicians use moral appeals extensively and that commonalities are larger than differences. This is in line with Frimer's (2020) conclusion, who notes that "liberals and conservatives may be cut from the same cloth" (p. 13). Many consistencies between the parties, studies, and countries are found, the most important ones being the prominence of Harm appeals (in line with the findings of Schein & Gray, 2015), the limited attention to Purity, and the preference for moral virtues as opposed to moral transgressions (corroborating Lewis, 2019). Differences are thus relative.

Furthermore, we expected that when studying ideological explanations for moral appeals in multiparty systems, a sole focus on the general left-right distinction would be insufficient. Our findings support the premise that the MFT should move away from the unidimensional focus and instead study the extent to which moral appeals are multidimensional. In this article, we looked into the congruence of moral appeals with three political dimensions: the sociocultural GAL/TAN, the economic left-right, and the populist dimension. While only some of our expectations were (partially) met in Study 1, most were supported in Study 2. This indicates that ideology does not only affect moral convictions but moral appeals as well (Hatemi et al., 2019). We tentatively conclude that the sociocultural and (to a lesser extent) economic left-wing bias is stronger in manifestos, but most notably, the sociocultural right-wing and the populist biases are stronger in tweets. Platform differences might explain this, but the reasons might also be more data driven. The Dutch data substantially impact the overall results, and Dutch PRR parties write very short election manifestos while being extremely active on Twitter. Regardless, this is an important finding, since tweets are much more likely to be picked up in mass media and travel within and beyond the Twitter sphere than manifestos (Popa, Fazekas, Braun, & Leidecker-Sandmann, 2020), especially when containing moral-emotional appeals (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel, 2017).

While we could not formally test whether ideological values cause moral appeals or whether the reverse is the case, our findings are not at odds with Hatemi et al. (2019).

This article was the first to look at the extent to which populist parties could be distinguished from other parties in their usage of moral appeals. As noted, morality is one of the key features of populism (Mudde, 2004): Populists pit the "pure" people against the "*immoral*, corrupt" elite, making the populist claim *moral* and symbolic, not empirical, in nature, meaning "it cannot be disproven" (our italics). One of the important consequences of this populist moral logic is its Manichean outlook: Contrary opinions are illegitimate, as is compromise, and political conflict is *moralized* by denouncing political opponents as evil and enemies of the people (e.g., Mudde, 2004). In theory, there are thus ample reasons to expect populists to use more moral rhetoric than their political opponents. Yet, this moral aspect in the populist message has only rarely been studied (Ekins, 2015; Norocel, 2013) and not yet in a systematic way, comparing populist to nonpopulist elite communication.[24] Indeed, we find that, when looking at tweets, the populist dimension explains the most divergence in the use of moral appeals: Scoring higher on this axis increases the likelihood of publishing a tweet containing a moral appeal more than the other dimensions do. In addition, on Twitter populists pay more attention to Harm, Ingroup, Authority, and Purity foundations but neglect Fairness. These findings are interesting in light of the research on populist political communication. While a growing number of scholars are interested in studying the articulation of the populist message in

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[23]If we exclude the words from the "general moral list," such as "good" and "bad," we find that 39.9% of the manifesto statements and 32.0% of the tweets holds a moral appeal.

[24]The few studies that showed that Trump scored much lower on the moral-language vocabulary than his opponents in the 2016 primaries (Lewis, 2019), while there is no evidence for more a prominent use of moral foundations by political extremist Twitter users in the United States (Alizadeh, et al., 2019).

various text corpora, they often find it difficult to rhetorically distinguish populists from nonpopulists (e.g., Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2010; Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017). This study is the first one focusing on the role of morality in setting apart populists from nonpopulists, opening up new avenues of research.

There are a few limitations to our study. The dictionary approach has been criticized for treating documents as a "bag of words" (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013, p. 272), approaching texts in a too simplistic manner. Yet, there are also clear advantages. It is efficient and cost effective in coding very large text corpora. But most importantly, using the MFD allows us to connect to previous research. Secondly, we not only used an existing dictionary but translated it in two different languages, applying one of those dictionaries to datasets from two different countries. Yet we systematically tested and refined both dictionaries to improve validity, which is exemplified by our validation test. In addition, the fact that many of our findings corroborate previous research strengthens our confidence in the validity of the data and our approach.

All in all, this study was the first to systematically study the usage of moral appeals by politicians in multiparty systems. It shows that European politicians of different ideological backgrounds make extensive use of moral arguments in their formal and informal political communication. One of the main conclusions is that commonalities between political elites are larger than differences. However, especially when communication is less scripted, political elites do tend to distinguish themselves from opponents in their appeals to different moral foundations, and these appeals are congruent with their ideological values. Recent research has indicated that moral appeals might not only mobilize electorates (Jung, 2020), but moral attitudes can polarize them too (e.g., Ryan, 2017). Whether the use of moral appeals by European elites can have similar positive and negative consequences is up to future research.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Appendix S1. Moral Appeals in Manifestos per Country

Figure S1 .1. Moral appeals in Austrian manifesto statements by ideological dimensions.

Figure S1 .2. Moral appeals in German manifesto statements by ideological dimensions.

Figure S1 .3. Moral appeals in Dutch manifesto statements by ideological dimensions.

Appendix S2. Moral Appeals in Tweets per Country

Figure S2 .1. Moral appeals in Austrian tweets by ideological dimensions.

Figure S2 .2. Moral appeals in German tweets by ideological dimensions.

Figure S2 .3. Moral appeals in Dutch tweets by ideological dimensions.

Appendix S3. Additional Results for all Countries

Figure S3 .1. Moral appeals in manifesto statements by populist left and right.

Figure S3 .2. Moral appeals in tweets by populist/non-populist dimension.

Figure S3 .3. Moral appeals in manifesto statements by ideological dimensions—without control for sentiment.

Figure S3 .4. Moral appeals in tweets by ideological dimensions—without control for sentiment.

Appendix S4. Validation Results

Table S4 .1. Proportions of True Classifications

Appendix S5. Excerpt Examples

Appendix S6. German Moral Foundations Dictionary

Appendix S7. Dutch Moral Foundations Dictionary