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Published online: 11 Jan 2021.

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Recent research suggests that political beliefs in different geographic locations shape religious groups' sensitivity toward and representation of moral intuitions. Guided by moral foundations theory, we test this possibility with content analysis. We compared moral intuitions represented in church sermons of one religious denomination located in counties with liberal versus conservative voting records. Fifty-eight sermons based on identical biblical texts were selected from churches located in 28 liberal and 30 conservative counties throughout the United States. Chi-square analyses revealed: (1) sermons from conservative counties featured more moral intuitions overall than sermons from liberal counties, and (2) ingroup loyalty was overrepresented in sermons from conservative counties.

Keywords: Communication Theory; Mass Media; Political Communication

Moral foundations theory (MFT; Haidt & Joseph, 2007) suggests that the importance people place on moral values differs across groups. Moreover, these differences are manifest in the messages that groups communicate to the public. In line with this, Graham et al. (2009) provided evidence that conservatives and liberals differed in the importance placed on five specific *moral intuitions*, or sensitivities toward acts of care, fairness, ingroup loyalty, respect for authority, and purity. In three separate studies using the moral foundations questionnaire (MFQ-30; Graham et al., 2009), results showed that sensitivity toward different moral intuitions varied across conservative-leaning voters versus liberal-leaning. Liberals displayed greater sensitivity

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toward care and fairness, while conservatives considered all intuitions of roughly equal importance. In a fourth study, content analysis was used to examine the intuition-based sensitivities manifested in sermons from religious organizations expected to have different political leanings. The representation of moral intuitions varied across sermons sampled from different religious groups which compared politically liberal and politically conservative churches.

Although the observations of Graham et al. (2011) suggested meaningful differences in how moral values are associated with political attitudes across different religious groups, several issues concerning their study raise questions about the reliability and validity of their findings. Furthermore, while their results showed that both political and religious subcultures vary in their sensitivity toward different moral intuitions, they did not show that sensitivity differences in these subgroups are related. It is certainly plausible, and perhaps more likely, that these are simply two separate observations. Indeed, Graham et al. (2009) did not conduct this research with the goal of demonstrating a relationship between political beliefs and religious affiliation based on sensitivity toward moral intuitions but to demonstrate the predictive validity of the MFQ-30.

Guided by logic from the model of intuitive morality and exemplars (MIME; Tamborini, 2013), the present study builds on Graham et al.'s (2009) work to ask whether political beliefs (based on liberal/conservative voting records) are related to the representation of moral intuitions found in religious messaging. When interpreters (e.g., pastors, rabbis) of religious texts select topics for consideration, are they unknowingly influenced by the salient topics of their community, which may be a function of regional political leaning? Using samples taken from one religious denomination, we compare how moral intuitions are presented by pastors from churches in United States counties with liberal versus conservative voting records.

Our paper begins with an overview of MFT, the MIME, and describes noted differences in the moral sensitivities of liberals and conservatives. We then review Graham et al.'s (2009) work, analyzing the moral foundations present in religious sermons. Finally, we describe the present study, which was designed to replicate and extend Graham et al.'s (2009) work with a sample less susceptible to reliability and validity criticisms.

Moral Foundations Theory

MFT (Haidt & Joseph, 2007) builds on the social intuitionist perspective, reasoning that moral judgments are the result of innate moral intuitions (or instincts). Moral intuitions are described by MFT scholars as evolutionarily developed sensitivities to distinct domains of social behavior (Haidt & Joseph, 2007). These intuitions are thought to form the foundation upon which all judgments of right or wrong are made.

MFT specifies five unique moral domains. *Care* is associated with a sensitivity toward empathy, compassion, and concern for others' welfare. *Fairness* is associated

with concerns for justice, equity, and truth. *Ingroup loyalty* focuses on bias for one's ingroup and against one's outgroup. *Respect for authority* favors benevolent leadership, institutional hierarchies, and social traditions. Finally, *purity* is associated with a sacred commitment to protecting against social contamination. The existence of each intuition is deemed universal across cultures (Haidt, 2001).

Research examining the MFQ-30 has identified a two-factor structure labeled as "individualizing" and "binding" intuitions. The *individualizing intuitions*, which include care and fairness, are characterized by a sensitivity toward "teaching individuals to respect the rights of other individuals" (Graham et al., 2009, p. 1030). The *binding intuitions*, which include loyalty, authority, and purity, are characterized by a sensitivity toward "strengthening groups and institutions and by binding individuals into roles and duties" (p. 1030).

Although each intuition is thought to be innate, MFT assumes that an intuition's salience is continuously shaped by environmental cues. That is, the importance of different intuitions (or sets of intuitions) to any individual or group can vary as a result of the prevailing attitudes in one's social group or culture (Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008). For example, Graham et al. (2011) found that, compared to individualistic cultures, collectivistic cultures tend to place greater value on the binding intuitions of ingroup loyalty and purity.

The Model of Intuitive Morality and Exemplars

The MIME (Tamborini, 2013) provides a basis for the expectation that prevailing regional values would influence the messages of local clergy. The MIME combines logic from MFT and exemplification theory to outline a reciprocal model suggesting that messages created for different cultures will differ in their representations of the moral intuitions. These processes describe how the salience of specific moral intuitions in different cultures leads to greater emphasis of those intuitions in message content that prevails within that culture. The model's underlying psychological mechanisms suggest moral values will be reflected as identity-consistent communication content found in messages produced for different subculture groups (for more details see Tamborini, 2013). Without this assumption, researchers can only guess what values bind groups and how they appear in messages.

The present study applies the model to a political context to examine the representation of moral intuitions in liberal versus conservative voting regions of the U.S. The liberal versus conservative nature of different regions is defined in this paper based simply on the preponderance of Democratic versus Republican voting behavior within separate U.S. counties. Attempts to determine the liberal versus conservative political values of a subgroup are often accomplished with surveys that contain questions on a patchwork of issues that lack a coherent structure. MFT overcomes this problem by providing a coherent scheme that can be used to distinguish liberal versus conservative groups based on their sensitivity toward individualizing and binding intuitions.

Research Examining Moral Intuitions in Political and Religious Contexts

The importance placed on different moral intuitions seems to vary as a function of political preference (Graham et al., 2009). Liberals tend to value individualizing intuitions more than binding intuitions, while conservatives tend to place equal value on all five intuitions. Research suggests that differences in moral intuition salience form the basis for individuals' views on politically polarizing issues, such as abortion, global warming, and immigration (Koleva et al., 2012).

The intuition divide between liberals and conservatives is well-documented in past research. For example, Feinberg and Willer (2013) found that only liberals considered recycling a moral issue, while Haidt and Hersh (2001) found that only conservatives perceived gay marriage to be a moral issue. In related work, research on terrorist groups provided evidence suggesting that left-wing terrorist groups' activities are most often motivated by a desire to uphold individualizing intuitions, whereas right-wing terrorist groups' activities are mostly motivated by binding intuitions (Hahn et al., 2019).

Graham et al. (2009) found consistent differences across four studies examining how intuitions manifest in liberals' and conservatives' judgments of (1) specific issues' moral relevance, (2) various moral scenarios, and (3) moral taboos. They found liberals' judgments were rooted in a sensitivity to the individualizing intuitions, whereas conservatives' judgments were based equally on concerns for individualizing and binding intuitions. In a fourth study, Graham et al. (2009) analyzed the extent to which public speeches, targeted at members of one political party or another, contained appeals to these respective intuition differences.

To do this, they analyzed the content of religious sermons for evidence of an intuition-based political divide, which offered two advantages to other types of political public addresses. First, religious sermons are more likely to address specific, detailed moral concerns, compared to the broad policy ideals expected from political communications. Second, sermons can be expected to be more explicit in their moral leanings. As such, religious sermons offered an opportunity to examine political party intuition differences organically.

Graham et al. (2009) compared the moral content of sermons produced by 69 Unitarian (liberal) and 34 Southern Baptist (conservative) churches. Through a combination of a word-count approach and a validation of the word's use in a moral context, they presented evidence consistent with their predictions. Liberal-leaning Unitarian sermons contained more appeals to individualizing intuitions and conservative-leaning Southern Baptist sermons contained more appeals to binding intuitions. Although some of their analyses showed patterns consistent with expected differences between conservative and liberal churches across the broad categories of individualizing and binding intuitions, other analyses were inconsistent when examining the separate intuitions that make up the individualizing (i.e., care and fairness) and binding (i.e., loyalty, authority, and purity) categories.

Though these findings were informative, their study contained several problems. First, they selected sermons from *different denominations*, each of which have

different cultural norms. As a result, the emphasis on different intuitions observed in Unitarian and Southern Baptist sermons may have been produced by different variables confounded with these religious groups. Second, the sermons sampled were based on *different* religious *texts*. As such, variance across religious groups may have resulted because the different biblical texts selected focused on different moral intuitions. Third, the sermons examined were sampled over a 12-year span (1994–2006), potentially introducing extraneous variables that accounted for the differences they observed. Fourth, Unitarians and Southern Baptists were selected for the study specifically because they are overtly political and could be expected to reflect the political rhetoric of their associated parties. This made the Graham et al. (2009) study less an examination of how moral intuitions presented in religious messages may be influenced by prevailing political beliefs, and more an examination of the dominant moral codes found in the political communications of those parties.

Finally, Graham et al. (2009). conducted their study by using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count program (LIWC; see Pennebaker et al., 2007) to simply count words found in the Moral Foundations Dictionary (MFD; Graham et al., 2009). Although they attempted to contextualize the meaning of the words found using human coders, their analysis was still limited by validity concerns regarding the MFD (see Hopp et al., 2018 for further discussion). For example, the word "help" does not appear in the MFD. Attending to others' needs (i.e., helping) is a major tenet of the care domain, yet Graham et al.'s analysis would have overlooked any instances of "helping" present in religious sermons. Nevertheless, despite these problems, Graham et al.'s claims were supported through three other investigations. If their claims are true, we should expect the same intuition-based political differences to be observed in a more rigorous test. The present study attempts to provide this test using sermons selected from *one* religious denomination using the *same* religious *texts* in the *same year*.

The religious denomination selected for this study is the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). WELS is small compared to Unitarians and Baptists but has characteristics that overcome some of the limitations of research by Graham et al. (2009). Moreover, it is well-suited to test MIME predictions regarding how regional differences and political preferences might influence the representation of moral intuitions in religious sermons. WELS follows the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship periscope (ILCW), meaning that on a given Sunday all churches preach on the *same text*, controlling for potential differences in the extent to which different intuitions are made salient in the text of different Scripture as well as potential historical effects for the weeks covered. As such, differences observed in WELS's sermons located in conservative versus liberal regions should be attributable to environmental differences rather than differences in the denominations examined.

The research by Graham et al. (2009) compared conservative and liberal religious groups by examining the collapsed categories of binding versus individualizing intuitions, and with tests examining each of the five separate intuitions. As such,

we understand the need to test our expectations on both the collapsed categories and the five intuitions.

> **H₁**: Sermons sampled from strongly Democratic counties in strongly Democratic states will contain proportionally more references to individualizing intuitions (care or fairness) than sermons sampled from strongly Republican counties in strongly Republican states.
>
> **H₂**: Sermons sampled from strongly Republican counties in strongly Republican states will contain proportionally more references to binding intuitions (authority, loyalty, or purity) than sermons sampled from strongly Democratic counties in strongly Democratic states.

Method

Sample

Religious Organization
We conducted a content analysis examining sermons delivered by churches within the WELS, a theologically conservative Christian denomination that developed as an apolitical, national religious organization. The WELS mandates strict adherence to the original Biblical text. The pastors of the Synod receive four years of training in Hebrew and Greek prior to being allowed admission to the Seminary to continue their studies. Sermons are prepared from Greek and Hebrew texts that the pastors themselves translate on a weekly basis in order to achieve as high a fidelity level as possible to the original manuscript and limit the influence of any factors outside the Bible itself. The WELS was selected for this study to control for several naturally occurring factors that could influence political leaning or preference toward specific moral intuitions expressed in sermons, while representing a wide range of locations throughout the United States. For detail on these potential extraneous variables, controlled by selection of the WELS, please see OSF (https://osf.io/8pfnj/?view_only=15e968e739774d898a868e9babeed600).

Liberal and Conservative Regions
Voter preference for political candidates was used to identify regions of the country considered conservative or liberal. The political classification of voter data was based on the 2014 midterm elections. To identify regions of interest, voting results from gubernatorial races in 2014 were gathered from CNN.com's election results. We operationalized conservative regions as showing strong voter preference for Republican candidates and liberal regions as those showing strong preference for Democratic candidates. To focus our sample on areas with the clearest and strongest political leanings, we conducted a multi-step procedure to identify regions of interest. First, we deemed the 10 states that voted most strongly in favor of the Republican candidate as conservative and the 10 that voted most strongly in favor of the Democratic candidate as liberal. Next, within these states, we selected counties in the top 50% of those supporting the Republican gubernatorial candidates as regions to

examine conservative sermons and counties in the top 50% of those supporting the Democratic candidates as regions to examine liberal sermons.

Sermon Selection Process

The WELS church locator at wels.net is designed to help people find churches in their areas. Searches were made for the identified political regions, returning results for churches in the area. To be included in the study, churches needed to have (a) a website and (b) publicly available audio or video of their sermons. For all churches meeting these criteria, the sermons from February 18, 2018 (i.e., the first Sunday of Lent, ILCW Series B) were selected. Sermons for this date in the WELS were based on the following Biblical texts: Genesis 22:1–18; Romans 8:31–39; and Mark 1:12–15. This selection procedure resulted in a sample of 58 sermons ($n_{liberal\ areas}$ = 28, $n_{conservative\ areas}$ = 30) to be coded. All texts address identical established themes for the first Sunday of Lent (an emphasis on the penitential need for a Messiah).

Unitization

Each minute of every sermon served as the unit of analysis. Although starting a new unit of analysis every minute could break longer lessons and parables into multiple units within a sermon, our expectation was that intuitions would be present with great frequency. We felt it easier for coders to accurately identify the presence of intuitions in shorter time segments than in longer time segments where multiple intuitions may have been present. Coders were told to code only the content with spoken words and to ignore content with hymnals or opening/closing music for the sermon. This process led to 1189 units (or minutes of content) coded ($n_{liberal\ areas}$ = 547 units, $n_{conservative\ areas}$ = 642 units).

Coding Procedure

Coding was completed by human coders rather than the LIWC program used by Graham et al. (2009). Human coders are capable of recognizing words or phrases associated with intuitions that may be missed by the LIWC. Specifically, the present study used a protocol that has been successfully implemented in previous research to code message content (Hahn et al., 2019; Hahn et al., 2019). The protocol outlines unique features of each moral intuition that constitute an act, or language describing an act, related to each respective intuition (for details see Tamborini et al., 2017). More specifically, *care* was coded when an act related to a response to another's need. *Fairness* was coded when an action related to the equal or equitable distribution of goods/resources/justice. *Ingroup loyalty* was coded when an action showed preference to an ingroup member. *Respect for authority* was coded when an individual submitted or deferred to benevolent hierarchies or power structures. *Purity* was coded when individuals tempered their hedonistic desires to lead a noble or chaste lifestyle.

Coder Training and Intercoder Agreement

Four independent coders recorded the presence of the five moral intuitions in each sermon. Coders participated in a 2-month training program wherein they (a) were trained on the coding protocol, (b) applied the protocol to identify the presence of moral intuitions in example content, (c) coded example content together, (d) engaged in weekly coding assignments, and (e) collectively discussed coding disagreements. After training was complete, 10 sermons were randomly selected to be coded by all coders to assess intercoder agreement (n_{units} = 207; 17.41% of the sample). Percent agreement was used to assess reliability among the four coders. In line with previous research, the threshold for percent agreement was set at 80% (Neuendorf, 2002).

Although more traditional measures of intercoder agreement ideally would have been applied (e.g., Krippendorff's α or Scott's π), these measures become less valid in the presence of dichotomous variables and a large number of blank or "missing" codes (Zhao, 2011), as their assessment of chance agreement becomes extremely skewed. Both criteria were met with the present data. First, each coding category had values of only present or absent. Second, although at least one intuition was present in almost every unit, there were still 4 blank cells for every one cell containing an intuition. For example, in 10 units, even if there are 10 intuitions present, that leaves 40 blank cells among the 5 coding categories. In the present data, despite having 1211 cells indicating a present intuition, 4734 blank cells were left blank. With this many blank cells, traditional measures of intercoder agreement would be severely attenuated (Zhao, 2011).

Accordingly, we calculated percent agreement for the presence of care (85.91%), fairness (96.46%), ingroup loyalty (91.30%), authority (90.98%), and purity (81.72%). After intercoder agreement was assessed, each coder coded 25% of the remaining 982 units individually.

Results

Before testing our hypotheses, we first examined some of the descriptive features of our sample. On average, sermons were 20.47 minutes long ($n_{liberal\ areas}$ = 19.54 minutes, $n_{conservative\ areas}$ = 21.4 minutes) and featured 20.70 intuitions ($n_{liberal\ areas}$ = 15.46, $n_{conservative\ areas}$ = 25.93). Overall, 836 of the 1189 units contained at least one intuition; 672 units contained at least one binding intuition and 404 contained at least one individualizing intuition. Second, a chi-square test comparing the overall presence of individualizing and binding intuitions revealed that, across all sermons, binding (n = 794) intuitions were proportionally overrepresented compared to individualizing (n = 417) intuitions, χ^2 (1209) = 116.32, p <.01. This was driven by the overwhelming preponderance of the purity intuition, which was featured proportionally more often than any other intuition (n = 435), followed by care (n = 353), and authority (n = 259), χ^2 (1209) = 420.36, p < .01. Ingroup loyalty (n =

100) and fairness ($n = 64$) were featured less often. A second chi-square test comparing the overall presence of intuitions in sermons from conservative versus liberal regions revealed that conservative regions ($n = 778$) featured more intuitions than sermons from liberal regions ($n = 433$), χ^2 (1211) = 97.72, $p < .01$. This held true when examining individual intuitions as well, with sermons from conservative regions featuring more of every single intuition than sermons from liberal regions.

H$_1$ and H$_2$ claimed, respectively, that sermons from liberal counties would feature more individualizing intuitions (care and fairness) and sermons for conservative counties would feature more binding intuitions (loyalty, authority, and purity). Analyses were conducted to test H$_1$ and H$_2$ at both the level of global intuitions (i.e., the individualizing and binding categories) and the five separate intuitions level. In the first analysis, a 2 (conservative x liberal) x 2 (binding/individualizing) chi-square was conducted to test H$_1$ and H$_2$ at the global level. Results of this analysis suggested no difference in the extent to which individualizing or binding intuitions were featured in sermons from liberal or conservative regions, χ^2 (1209) = .933, $p = .33$, *Cramer's V* = .03. In the second analysis, a 2 (liberal/conservative) x 5 (care, fairness, ingroup loyalty, authority, purity) chi-square was conducted to test H$_1$ and H$_2$ on the five separate intuitions. The results were significant, χ^2(1209) = 11.82, $p = .02$, *Cramer's V* = .10. Inspection of adjusted residuals in Table 1 revealed that ingroup loyalty was overrepresented in sermons from conservative regions (adj. resid. = 3.0) compared to liberal regions (adj. resid. = −3.0); however, no other differences emerged. Table 1 shows frequencies by region (total, liberal, and conservative) and intuition types along with adjusted residuals comparing liberal versus conservative regions for each intuition type. Examples of sermons from liberal and conservative counties that were coded into each category can be found at https://osf.io/8pfnj/?view_only=15e968e739774d898a868e9babeed600.

Table 1 Frequency of Moral Intuitions in Sermons

	Total Intuitions	Liberal Regions Intuitions	Conservative Regions Intuitions
Care	353	138 (1.5)	215 (−1.5)
Fairness	64	19 (1.1)	45 (−1.1)
Ingroup loyalty	100	22 (**3.0**)	78 (**−3.0**)
Respect for Authority	259	99 (1.0)	160 (−1.0)
Purity	435	155 (0.1)	280 (−0.1)
Total	1,211	433	778

Numbers in parentheses represent adjusted standardized residuals.
Bold indicates a statistically significant result ($p <.05$).

Discussion

Our study attempted to examine whether sermons from regions characterized by stark political differences emphasize moral intuitions often ascribed to their political affiliations. Building on previous findings by Graham et al. (2009) showing that political affiliation influenced religious leaders' use of moral intuitions, we tested MIME-based predictions suggesting that environmental forces represented in regional political preferences could shape how moral intuitions are presented in sermons. The MIME predicts that sermons from liberal regions of the country would contain more individualizing intuitions, whereas sermons from conservative regions would contain more binding intuitions. In line with MIME predictions, we found that one binding intuition, ingroup loyalty, was overrepresented in sermons from conservative regions. However, deviating from predictions and inconsistent with previous findings by Graham et al. (2009), no other intuition differences emerged.

Conceivably, the failure to find that other binding intuitions were featured more often in churches from politically conservative regions may be due to the simple fact that churches in conservative regions featured more instances of *every* moral intuition. An elevated representation of binding intuitions in sermons from conservative regions could well appear statistically insignificant if these sermons contained more representations of all intuitions. Significant differences would only result if the overrepresentation for binding intuitions was proportionally greater than the overrepresentation of intuitions overall. As such, although we did not make a priori predictions comparing the overall representation of moral intuitions in conservative and liberal regions, it would be remiss to ignore that these intuitions were overrepresented in sermons from conservative voting counties. Indeed, this observation has useful implications for scholars interested in how religion might moderate the role of moral intuitions in political discourse. The overall overrepresentation of moral intuitions in sermons delivered to conservative communities not only suggests the greater salience of these intuitions in conservative regions, but it raises questions about whether moral intuitions have greater efficacy in shaping attitudes among members of these politically defined communities.

In hindsight, perhaps the fact that sermons preached in conservative regions featured more intuitions overall should not be a surprise. As previously stated, Graham et al. (2009) indicated that while liberal-leaning churches emphasized individualizing intuitions more than binding intuitions, conservative-leaning churches emphasized *all* intuitions. Although Graham et al. (2011) never asserted that conservative-leaning churches placed a greater emphasis on moral intuitions than liberal-leaning churches, the fact that conservative churches placed great emphasis on binding intuitions without deemphasizing individualizing intuitions might predict the type of overall differences observed in the study. Our findings suggest not only that binding intuitions are more salient in conservative regions, but moral intuitions in general may play a more prominent role in the discourse and decision making that occurs in conservative regions.

Our study has both theoretical and practical value. First, our findings support and extend MIME-based predictions regarding the manner in which environmental factors can influence the representation of moral intuitions in human communication. Theory underlying the MIME suggests the salience of different moral intuitions varies across different morality subcultures. The MIME's recursive processes predict this variance will be represented throughout the message environment in which members of the subculture reside. This study extends support for this MIME-based prediction to include the influence of regional differences in political ideology on the representation of moral intuitions in religious messages.

With regard to practical implications, we should not ignore that one intuition was found to differ across politically defined communities. Given the recent reporting of salient political events, and the extent to which ingroup and outgroup loyalty issues have become critical in social discourse, it is impossible to overlook that ingroup loyalty was represented differently in sermons from churches located in politically conservative and liberal voting districts. Pastors in both districts are likely to emphasize the importance of the values that these intuitions underlie. If pastors in conservative regions provide a greater emphasis on ingroup loyalty (or bias toward one's ingroup and against one's outgroup), one is forced to wonder what effect this might have on congregation members.

Limitations

This study contains traditional limitations of content analyses regarding scope and control; however, the population itself introduces some unique difficulties. First, the WELS is an exclusive organization whose churches could differ from others. Although the similarity across pastors and churches controls for many naturally occurring threats to internal validity, this may raise external validity concerns. Given that our study aimed to examine whether the political bent of a church's location was related to the representation of moral intuitions, we thought the internal validity benefits outweighed external validity concerns. Nevertheless, the issue remains a concern. Second, although we know nothing about the pastors' lives prior to their religious training, demographic considerations of gender, religiosity, income, and having trained in conservative-leaning Mequon, WI may indicate the pastorate of the WELS skews Republican in their private beliefs. Once again, although this issue is noteworthy, we believed the tradeoff for internal validity exceeded this concern.

Conclusion

Across counties with different political inclinations, we observed that sermons by pastors from the same religious denomination vary in their representation of moral intuitions. The representation of moral intuitions found in sermons of WELS pastors differed as a function of a church's location in conservative versus liberal voting

counties. Notably, we found these differences even within sermons by WELS clergy, known for efforts to actively avoid outside influence. Because this should attenuate the effect of regional political influence, we might expect even stronger effects in other religious denominations. This observation raises questions regarding the potential influence of a region's political bent on the expression of religious values, and the influence of the expression of religious values on a region's political bent. Do these differences indicate that the values expressed by religious leaders are shaped by local political leanings beyond the influence of the values found in the religious teachings of the denominations they represent?

Our research provides evidence of a relationship between the prevailing political leaning of a region and the presence of associated moral intuitions in religious communication, though content analysis cannot establish causality. Research is needed to examine these patterns within different religious denominations, as replications with diverse samples will increase confidence our findings' reliability and the scope. Additional research should examine how the salience of moral intuitions to congregation members is related to a church's location. Do congregants located in conservative versus liberal voting districts show sensitivities toward different moral intuitions that match the intuition's emphasis in the sermons they hear? Our study cannot answer these questions, but their relevance to issues facing society underscores the need for research examining this possibility.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by authors.

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