The Social Dimension of Political Values

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Abstract. Worries about the instability of political attitudes and lack of ideological constraint among the public are often pacified by the assumption that individuals have stable political values. These political values are assumed to help individuals filter political information and thus both minimize outside influence and guide people through complex political environments. This perspective, though, assumes that political values are stable and consistent across contexts. This piece questions that assumption and argues that political values are socially reinforced—that is, that political values are not internal predispositions, but the result of social influence. I consider this idea with two empirical tests: an experimental test that recreates the transmission of political values and an observational analysis of the effect of politically homogeneous social contexts on political value endorsements. Results suggest that political values are socially reinforced. The broader implication of my findings is that the concepts scholars term "political values" may be reflections of individuals' social contexts rather than values that govern individual political behavior.

Introduction

There is a normative democratic concern about the instability of political attitudes and lack of ideological constraint among the public (e.g., Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954; Converse 1964). Indeed, as Valentino and Nardis (2013) claim, "If people do not have stable preferences over competing policies, as Downs's (1957) economic theory of democracy demands, constructing a government that effectively translates majority preferences into policies is impossible" (568). The worry is—if the public has unstable attitudes that are easily manipulated by social influence, the media, and political elites (Zaller 1992), how can individuals make reasonable political choices or—at the very least—elect representatives that best serve their interests?

Zaller's (1992) answer to this question is that people are not simply passive observers of political information. Instead, individuals filter information from elites through "stable, individual-level traits": political values (Zaller 1992, 22-24). Scholars have long considered political values an important component of preferences, arguing that political values influence ideology, issue attitudes, partisanship, and presidential evaluations (see, Feldman 2013), and may even explain political choices *better than* ideology (Caprara and Vecchione 2013). As Nelson and Garst (2005) explain, "In lieu of political ideology, which most research suggests the general public lacks, values function as general standards for evaluating candidates, policies, and other objects in the political universe" (490).

Underlying this idea, however, is an important assumption that political values "transcend specific situations," as Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) argue basic human values do.[1] It is assumed,

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[1] While there is an abundance of literature on basic human values (see Schwartz and Bilsky 1987; Rokeach 1968, 1973, 1979), as well as moral foundations values (see Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009), this piece limits itself specifically to the discussion and empirical investigation of *political values* (Caprara and Vecchione 2013; Ciuk 2016; Ciuk 2017; Ciuk, Lupton, and Thornton, forthcoming; 1988, 2003, 2013; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Goren 2005; Goren et al. 2009;

for example, that when a person approaches a new political issue or decision, she will turn to her political values, among other predispositions, to inform that decision. In this view, political decisions can be coherent and fairly independent, even if the person lacks all the information or a clear ideology. If, however, political values fail to "transcend specific situations," those decisions lack the independent and coherent quality that we seek. Essentially, if we are to assume that political values guide us, we must also assume that they are stable and not easily moved.

Yet, recent research puts this assumption in doubt, suggesting that political values are less stable, and perhaps more malleable, than previous scholarship had assumed (e.g., Goren 2005, 2009; Goren, Federico, and Kittilson 2009; McCann 1997; Nelson et al. 1997). These more recent findings stand in contrast to research suggesting that political values are a consistent filter on outside political information. Addressing this conflicting research, I approach political values from a new perspective. I argue that political values are *not* fundamental guides in the political world. Instead, I theorize that people adopt the political values of those around them because it is socially desirable to do so. Reported political values, I suggest, are a function of social influence—implying, then, that political values may be no more stable or robust than basic political attitudes.[2]

My empirical analyses—one that relies on an experiment and one that translates the experimental results into a broader perspective using American National Election Studies (ANES) data—offer support for my argument that the endorsement of political values is shaped by one's social environment. These results, which are consistent across both methods as well as various

Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Jacoby 2006, 2014; Knutsen 1995; Kuklinski 2001; McCann 1997; Nelson and Garst 2005; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Schwartz, Caprara, and Vecchione 2010; Zaller 1992).

[2] Research finds that political *attitudes* can be influenced by social and survey contexts (e.g., Bartels 2003; Chong and Druckman 2007; Nelson et al. 1997; Klar 2014; Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Tversky and Kahneman 1981), but the assumption is that political *values* are more stable.

robustness checks, imply a new, social dimension to the political values we previously knew as robust and deep-seated.

What Are Political Values?

Political scientists define political values as "abstract, general conceptions about the desirable or undesirable end-states of human life," which provide people with a "general evaluative standard for confronting the world" (Jacoby 2006). Values are different from political attitudes. In particular, while both are evaluative, what differentiates values from attitudes is that values are "relatively few and more central" than attitudes (Feldman 2003, 480).

Scholars generally endorse this conceptual definition of political values, where political values are core to the self and guide political behavior. Values have been found to predict positions on social welfare (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001), government spending (Jacoby 2006), candidate evaluations (Feldman 1988), beliefs about racial equality (Kinder and Sanders 1996), and judgments on tolerance (Peffley, Knigge, and Hurwitz 2001), among others—leading to partisanship-aligned value polarization (Jacoby 2014). In fact, Schwartz et al. (2010) argue that values account for 54% of the variance in vote choice, concluding that values are foundational in explaining variation in political attitudes and behavior. This view of political values as guides in the political world is further enforced by research suggesting that political values help filter political information (Kam 2005; Zaller 1992) and guide people through complex political environments (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987).

In contrast to this set of findings, though, other research points to evidence that individuals' endorsements of political values are less consistent—and more malleable—than originally assumed. Nelson et al. (1997), for example, show that issue framing can change the relevance of

political values to individuals, and McCann (1997) finds that the endorsement of political values is constrained by candidate evaluation. Taking these ideas a step further, Goren (2005) and Goren et al. (2009) investigate the relationship between partisanship and values, finding that partisanship is more stable than certain political values (Goren 2005)[3] and that party source cues affect the expression of these values (Goren et al. 2009).

Yet even while acknowledging that values are heavily dependent on partisanship, Goren et al. (2009) resist the implications that values are largely a function of party preferences, noting that,

> "to be clear, we are not claiming that core political values are akin to other short-term perceptions. We believe, like many others, that political values are central elements in mass belief systems. Nor do we expect that partisan influence will produce wholesale value change. Instead, partisan forces should affect values at the margins, essentially leading identifiers to become a little bit more or less enamored of a given value" (Goren et al. 2009, 807).

Indeed, while Goren (2005) and Goren et al. (2009) suggest that causally values may be driven by partisanship, more recent work on political values returns to the idea that values guide certain political issue positions, over and above partisanship (e.g., Evans and Neundorf 2018).

The aforementioned research suggests two points. First, it demonstrates that much of the research in political science assumes that values are more robust than attitudes—that while attitudes can be shifted by changing context or social environment, values mean more to people and thus are more resistant to change. Second, it suggests that values may be more malleable than

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[3] However, recent research in British elections found the opposite—that values were more stable than partisanship (see Evans and Neundorf 2018). This difference in findings could be due to many things, including difference in time, populations, electoral styles, and variable operationalizations.

some of this foundational research on values assumes.[4] Building on these findings, in this manuscript I argue that there is a *social* dimension to political values—specifically, that people adopt the political values of those around them because it is socially desirable to do so. This is in contrast to the idea that individuals' political values are immutable political guides, but in line with findings that political values are malleable. I go further, though, and offer a theoretically-motivated, and empirically-supported, explanation of this malleability.

Social Influence & Value Endorsements

Social Context. Research suggests that people are highly motivated by social goals (Cosmides and Tooby 1992; Petersen 2015). Indeed, Goffman's (1967) theory of face management claims that individuals present a "face"—or some positive social value—to others in attempt to exude the most positive impression of themselves. People then work at this type of "self-presentation" almost constantly (Holtgraves 1992), and will, in fact, consciously misreport themselves to either avoid embarrassment or to make themselves appear more impressive (Kuran 1997; Zaller and Feldman 1992). That is, the desire—or perhaps even the need—to create and maintain a positive impression plays a substantial role in individuals' lives.

This tendency to misrepresent oneself based on self-presentation desires can be tracked by the self-monitoring trait, where those high in self-monitoring care more about impressing others than those low in self-monitoring do. A key component of this is the desire to be similar to certain types of people or associated with positively-perceived groups in hopes of achieving a positive

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[4] It should be noted, though, that the aforementioned results do not entirely dismiss the idea that people have stable underlying values. Instead, the results suggest that political values are somewhat malleable and thus create suspicion that they can be political guides.

self-presentation. Thus, telling individuals that a socially desirable group has a certain attitude or behaves in a certain way will lead high self-monitors to change their attitudes and behaviors to conform to that group (see Mutz 1998). This research implies the power of social settings—they can lead people to suppress unpopular or contentious political opinions (Klar 2014), as well as change how people describe their partisan identities (Klar and Krupnikov 2016).

Theory. Given the importance of social influence in various aspects of political behavior, I theorize that the social environment also influences individuals' reported political values. This theory stands in contrast to the idea that political values are far more robust than political attitudes. Rather, my theoretic approach suggests value plasticity, offering an explanation for why people's values are malleable yet congruent with other political beliefs. My theoretic approach suggests that much like political attitudes, political values are not only mutable but also socially-constrained.

In particular, I argue that people report certain value positions because it helps them achieve a positive self-presentation. Note, though, that the perception of what is socially desirable can differ depending on one's social context, environment, or network. That is, a Democrat's interpretation of a socially desirable value likely differs from a Republican's interpretation of a socially desirable value (see Klar and Krupnikov 2016 for discussion of context influencing perceptions of social desirability). Thus, I argue that Democrats adopt the political values of other Democrats because they infer that it is socially desirable to value (for example) equality and moral tolerance (some of the Democratic values). Or, Republicans *reject* these values because they infer it is socially desirable to do so. This social reinforcement of values should be driven most obviously by one's social context, which is key to social influence (see Huckfeldt et al. 2013).

That is, the more one is surrounded by co-partisans, the more she should endorse party congruent values—and this should be driven by self-presentation desires.[5]

Though this paper is the first to explicitly offer direct empirical evidence of the social construal of political values, existing research hints that social factors may be important in value endorsements. Jacoby (2006), for example, gives credence to the idea that values are socially influenced by noting that, "people experience vastly different socialization experiences and patterns of social interaction; it would be incredible if this did *not* have some noticeable effect on individuals' feelings about desirable and undesirable states of existence—i.e., values" (720). The theory proposed here specifically addresses this notion by proposing, developing, and empirically considering the possibility that values are socially reinforced.

Importantly, the potential that political values are a function of social forces also corresponds to the partisanship-aligned value polarization that we see—where Republicans emphasize morality, patriotism, and social order, and Democrats emphasize equality, economic security, and (to a lesser extent) freedom (Jacoby 2014). That is, although I argue that social desirability drives value endorsements, this does not mean that there should be one set of ideal political values. Since the two political parties endorse diametrically opposed sets of values, there should be similarly two sets of socially desirable values—one for Democrats and another for Republicans.

"True" Social Influence or Expression Change? It is important to note that studies on social influence often examine change in *expression* rather than "true" change (see especially Levitan

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[5] While there are various types of outside influence, including elite influence (Zaller 1992) and impersonal influence (e.g., Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990), this piece's focus is on *social* influence (see Huckfeldt et al. 2013).

and Verhulst 2015 who make this explicit). This is likely for two reasons. First, change in expression is simpler to measure than "true" attitudes. Second, as I argue below, expression change can be as important as—or even more important than—true change in attitudes.

Much like previous research, the findings I present cannot empirically determine whether shifts in expression are reflective of "true" value changes or simply changes in the expression of one's values. I argue, though, that either way the findings are important. If people's values are changing in response to social influence, we have evidence that the values political scientists believe are fundamental to how people think and behave politically can be influenced by those around them. This would suggest that values are unlikely to be guiding people through a complex and manipulative political world as some research (e.g., Converse 1964; Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Zaller 1992) suggests, implying that worries about citizens' ability to engage in politics can no longer be alleviated by the existence of political values. That is, in this case, the findings suggest that the social context matters more than values themselves.

The possibility that people's value *expressions* change by social context leads to similarly daunting conclusions, however. For the sake of argument, let us assume a scenario where people's values do not change *at all* and they simply answer value questions differently based on social influence at a given time. This may seem to be an innocuous measurement issue, but actually has broad implications for research on values. Scholars capture values through survey questions. Therefore, if participants' value expressions are moved by social cues, and then these values subsequently correlate with key political outcomes (e.g., Jacoby 2006, 2014), this would mean that it is actually responsiveness to social influence that is the better predictor of the aforementioned political outcomes. In short, whether the results in this piece indicate value change or change of value expression, the findings speak to the primacy of social influence and undercut the primacy

of values. Either a construct we use is socially influenced or its expression simply indicates a belief in following social cues. *Both* possibilities suggest that social context matters more than values.

Expectations and Empirical Approach

My empirical approach uses experimental and observational evidence to consider the expectation that people use social cues to determine the types of value responses that will make the most positive impression on others. I first rely on a survey experiment and subsequently turn to a set of analyses of ANES data. While each approach comes with its own limitations, jointly they allow me to consider my theoretic expectations from two different perspectives.

I rely on the survey experiment to analyze the causal effect of social cues on value endorsement. In this experimental approach I also directly consider the extent to which individuals' desire to present the most positive version of themselves exacerbates the influence of social cues on value reports. To do so, I make use of *self-monitoring*, a characteristic that captures susceptibility to social pressure (Berinsky 2004; Berinsky and Lavine 2012; Gangestad and Snyder 2000; Lavine and Snyder 1996; Terkildsen 1993; Weber, Lavine, Huddy, and Federico 2014). If, as I expect, people rely on cues because they want to make the most positive impressions, the effect of the social cue will change at different levels of self-monitoring. I thus theorize that those high in self-monitoring (i.e., those most susceptible to social pressure) will alter their values to look good more than those low in self-monitoring (i.e., those least susceptible to social pressure) will—or, that the effect of the social cue on value endorsement will increase with higher levels of self-monitoring. This would imply that the social reinforcement of values is driven by self-presentation desires.

Further, to enhance the external validity of these findings and consider these patterns in a broader perspective, I then use the 2000 ANES social networks data. This dataset allows me to test the effect of having a politically homogeneous social network on endorsing party congruent values. In doing so, I can analyze the social reinforcement of values in the real world. Note that this empirical approach aims to examine the effect of social influence on value endorsement by both experimentally manipulating the independent variable as well as measuring it using observational data. This approach enhances the overall validity of the findings by responding to an empirical question with various methods (see Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002).

Experiment

My experiment is designed to analyze whether social cues will lead individuals to adopt political values. I predict that this will be moderated by the self-monitoring trait, where those high in self-monitoring will be more influenced by the social cue those low in self-monitoring will. Given that political values are engrained in our political culture, using already-established political values would threaten internal validity due to partisan pretreatment (see Druckman and Leeper 2012 for discussion of pretreatment leading to internal validity threats). That is, since we know Democrats and Republicans already endorse different sets of values we can infer that they have already been "treated" with partisan cues in the real world. Thus, encountering an extra treatment in the context of the experiment would be redundant, and we would be unable to correctly estimate the causal effect of the social cue. Further, since the aim of this experiment is to capitalize on randomization of treatment and thus maintain internal validity, this potential threat of pretreatment is especially worrisome. Thus, the only way to examine the social reinforcement of values is with a non-salient political value that has similar criteria to our current political values but is relatively unaligned

with political parties. So, for the purposes of the experiment, I identified a non-partisan political value.

Values. In order to develop a value that allowed me to most directly tests the effects of social cues, I considered political constructs that meet the qualities we associate with political values: a potential for a split in public support for the two ends of the value and a strong belief among participants that the value is, indeed, a political value—i.e., that it refers to a "preferable mode of conduct or desirable end-state" (Feldman 2013, 603) or can "guide political decisions" (as it is worded to participants). Moreover, to avoid the partisan pre-treatment effects explained previously, this new value must lack association with a political party. Following these standards, I developed a set of political concepts that could reasonably appear to experimental participants to be political values. Then, I conducted two pre-tests to consider individual perceptions of these political concepts. Both pre-tests relied on data from two samples recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk; *pre-test 1 N*=500; *pre-test 2 N*=166).

In pre-test 1, participants were asked to consider 10 different political constructs (all listed in *Appendix A*). Specifically, they were asked how much they support each construct, if they associate it with a political party (and if so which party), if they believe the idea is a "value that can determine the types of political decisions that people make," and if they believe the idea is a "value that can determine the types of decisions people make in their daily lives." Full question wording can be found in *Appendix A.2*. In pre-test 2, a different group of participants was asked to consider the same 10 constructs, but this time each construct was paired with its logical opposite and participants were asked if they thought these values were in opposition to each other (i.e., "if you support one of the values, it makes it more difficult to support the other") or if they were

compatible (i.e., "that you can equally support and rely on both values"). The full question-wording and the full list of pairs participants considered can be found in *Appendix A.4*.

These pre-tests showed that the political constructs that appeared to participants to be political values were the opposing constructs of compromise versus standing your ground (from this point on, I call this value *compromise*, but it includes both ends—compromising and standing your ground). The compromise value showed variance in opinion, had little association with a political party, and, most importantly, the majority of participants believed this was a fundamental political value.[6] Full results from these pre-tests can be found in *Appendix A.3* and *Appendix A.5*.

Methods. In order to consider the effect of social cues on reported values, I rely on participants recruited via MTurk (*N*=400).[7] Of these participants, half were randomly assigned to take this study and the other half were randomized to take a different study. This randomization into two different studies left the study reported here with an *N*=192.

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[6] Although I use a value that has minimal *partisan* pre-treatment, there is some *general* pretreatment in that participants likely already had some views towards these values (see value distributions in preliminary studies). In this way, the treatment led participants to *change* their perception of this value (rather than initially develop it) in response to a social cue which branded compromise as endorsed by a positively-viewed political group. This speaks to the theory as values being socially reinforced rather than socially created.

[7] The sample was 48% female, 79% white, 51% college graduate or above; and with a mean age of 38. It was 34% leaning, weak, or strong Republican, 13% pure Independent, and 53% leaning, weak, or strong Democrat. Similarly, the sample was slightly skewed liberal (with a mean of 3.66 on a scale from 1 to 7). The sample was above average in terms of interest in news (with a mean of 1.65 on a scale from 1 to 3), taking part in political discussions (with a mean of 2.68 on a scale from 0 to 7), and attention to news media (with a mean of 4.15 on scale from 0 to 7). Given this sample (like typical MTurk samples) is above average in terms of education, interest, discussions, and attention to media, pretreatment is especially threatening (see Druckman and Leeper 2012). This reinforces the decision to use non-partisan political values, as established partisan values would almost certainly threaten internal validity. A check was conducted on the sample to examine the influence of bots on the collected data, which found non-threatening results (see *Appendix A.6*)

The study proceeded as follows. First, participants answered a set of questions about demographics, typical media usage, political interest, and the like. Among these questions were three self-monitoring questions (α=.66); responses to these were then combined to create a 13-point self-monitoring scale (see Berinsky and Lavine 2012). Similar to its distribution in the population, self-monitoring was skewed towards low self-monitoring, with a mean of 7.11 on a scale from 3 to 15 (recoded from low to high self-monitoring). Again, self-monitoring was measured to better examine social influence—where I predict that social cues should influence the endorsement of values for high self-monitors (those whose goal it is to impress others) more than for low self-monitors (those who care more about presenting their authentic selves than impressing others). Finding a moderating effect of self-monitoring would suggest that the social reinforcement of values is driven by self-presentation desires.

Following their responses to these preliminary questions, participants were told, "People vary greatly on which value they believe in *compromise* (that is, compromising with the other side even on issues that are very important to you in order to ensure that there is no stalemate) or *standing your ground* (that is, refusing to compromise on issues that are very important to you, even if it means risking a stalemate)." Participants were then randomly assigned to either receive a social cue about these values (the treatment condition) or receive no such cue (the control condition). Since a key component of social influence is the desire to be like certain types of people—and avoid associations with other types of people—the social cue aimed to suggest to participants that a positively-viewed group supports compromise over standing your ground.

To ensure that the social cue functioned in this theorized way, a pre-test with a separate sample of MTurk participants (*N*=500) were asked to rate much they want to have in common with certain groups of people. Out of the 9 groups asked about, the group of "people who listen to news

sources that support both political parties" was seen as the most positive—a 7.17 on a scale from 1 to 10 (negative to positive)—an outcome that follows from previous literature (Klar, Krupnikov, and Ryan 2018).[8] Thus, this group was selected to give the social cue in the treatment condition— their endorsement of compromise should increase participants', especially high self-monitors', endorsement of compromise.

This main manipulation (the social cue) was embedded in the value question, where participants in the treatment group read, "Interestingly, though, researchers have shown that those who listen to news sources that support both political parties tend to value *compromise* over *standing your ground*." As a reminder, those in the control group read the same previous statement as those in the treatment group—that "People vary greatly on which value they believe in *compromise* (that is, compromising with the other side even on issues that are very important to you in order to ensure that there is no stalemate) or *standing your ground* (that is, refusing to compromise on issues that are very important to you, even if it means risking a stalemate)"—but did *not* receive the follow-up social cue statement that the treatment group received.

Notably, this method of testing social influence is a conservative one. There are a number of ways to test social influence (see Huckfeldt et al. 2013), including possibly stronger treatments such as conducting a discussion with a confederate (see, e.g., Klar 2014) or using partisan cues (see, e.g., Cohen 2003). There are three main reasons why I opted against these options. First, research on social cues is deeply ambivalent about the possibility that using a confederate is a better operationalization of social influence (Meyer 1994). Further, using a confederate and social discussion introduces moving parts, challenging the experiment's internal validity. Therefore, I

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[8] Full question wording, list of other groups asked about, and results can be found in *Appendix A.2* and *Appendix A.3*.

opted for an experimental test which prioritized control over strength of treatment. If this is indeed a weaker treatment, then I have presented a more conservative test.

At the end of the experiment, participants in both conditions were then asked which end of the compromise value they support more—this was a zero-sum choice in that participants could not indicate support for both ends of the scale, and instead had to make a choice between compromise and standing your ground or say, "don't know."[9] To be clear, the experiment varies whether or not participants received a social cue endorsing compromise or received no such cue. I predict that endorsement of compromise by this socially desirable group will *increase* the number of participants who endorse compromise. I also predict that this will be moderated by the self-monitoring trait. These findings will indicate that values can be socially reinforced and that this is driven by self-presentation desires.

Results. The prediction for this experiment is that the social cue will influence the endorsement of political values and that this effect will be moderated by the self-monitoring trait. Specifically, following theoretic expectations, participants should follow the social cue and increasingly endorse compromise: the endorsement of compromise should be higher in the treatment than in the control condition. Once participants are split into low and high self-monitors, we should see that the social cue is effective for high self-monitors—those who want to be associated with positively-perceived groups—but not for low self-monitors, who care less about impressing others.

First, I examine the main effect of the social cue on value endorsement. This is shown in the first row of *Table 1*. Here we see that the social cue increases the endorsement of compromise

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[9] The question wording for the dependent variable was: "What about you—which do you believe in more?" with the options of compromise, standing your ground, or don't know.

at a marginally significant (*p*=.091) level. That is, when given the social cue that a positively-perceived group endorses compromise, more participants report valuing compromise over standing your ground (as compared to those given no social cue). Among all the participants, the treatment increases the mean endorsement of compromise by 12 percentage points.

Next, I examine the hypothesized moderating effect of self-monitoring. The self-monitoring scale can be considered in two ways: the scale can be split into two groups (Berinsky and Lavine 2012) or the scale can be used in its full form. I rely on both of these approaches—the former (the median split and two statistical tests) is represented in *Table 1* (rows 2 and 3) and *Figure 1*, and the latter (the continuous variable with marginal effects) can be found in *Appendix A.7*. These results support my theoretic expectations: when given the social cue, more high self-monitors report endorsing compromise as compared to standing your ground than when that cue is not present. In fact, for this group, the treatment increases the mean endorsement of compromise by 29 percentage points (*p*=.0048). Low self-monitors, on the other hand, endorse compromise 1 percentage point *less*, although this is far from significant (*p*=.8530).

Further, the effect of the social cue for high self-monitors is statistically different from the effect of the social cue for low self-monitors (p=.026; see *Appendix A.9*). To examine the robustness of these results—since self-monitoring is measured rather than manipulated—I see if adding controls alters the findings, which it does not (see Kam and Trussler 2017 for use of controls in experiments).[10] Finally, to ensure that partisanship is not confounding the results, I not only added partisanship as a control to the above model, but also examined if Republicans and

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[10] The controls added as a robustness check to the findings were measured pre-treatment and included partisanship, ideology, gender, age, race, education, attention to news, how often one discusses of politics, and how often one consumes news. The wording of these variables can be found in *Appendix A.7*.

Democrats reacted differently to the treatment. Although this latter check limits the sample size, we observe the same trend for both Democrats and Republicans (see *Appendix A.10*).

Table 1. Compromise Endorsement by Treatment, Self-Monitoring

	Condition	Observations	Mean	SE	T-Statistic	P-Value
All Participants	No Cue	89	.55	.05	1.70	.0911
	Cue	103	.67	.05		
High Self-Monitors	No Cue	41	.49	.08	2.90	.0048
	Cue	45	.78	.06		
Low Self-Monitors	No Cue	48	.60	.07	0.19	.8530
	Cue	58	.59	.07		

Figure 1. Compromise Endorsement by Treatment, Self-Monitoring
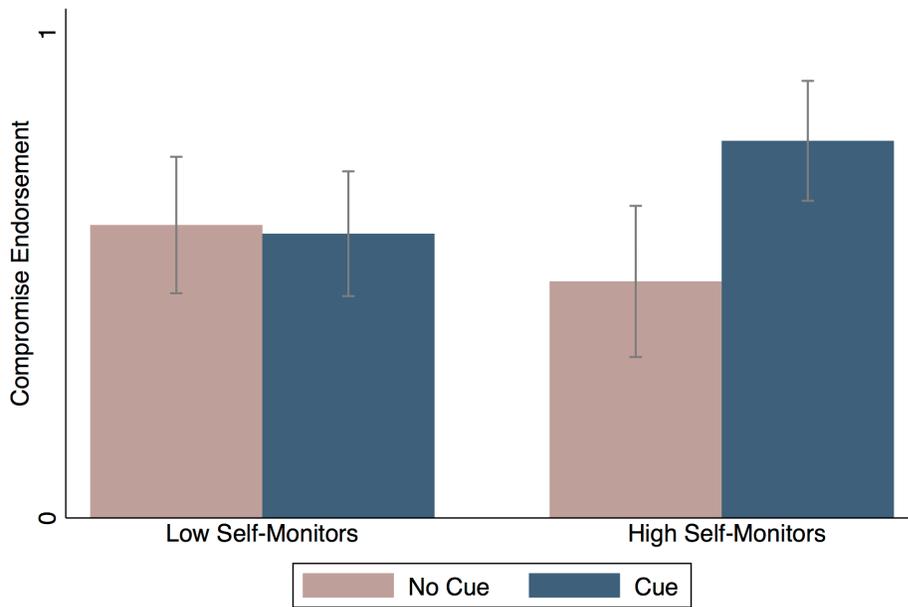
Median split of high and low self-monitors; confidence intervals at 95%; full scale (0-1) shown

Discussion. These results speak to an integral part of the theory—that people alter their political values because it is socially desirable to do—or, because it looks good to others. The effect of the social cue on high self-monitors supports this part of the theory. Again, when high self-monitors

were told that a positively-viewed group endorses compromise, they endorsed compromise as well. Low self-monitors did not do so, as they care about showing their authentic selves rather than impressing others. Overall, these findings give us both: 1) causal evidence that social cues can influence people's endorsements of political values, and 2) insight into the mechanism driving the social reinforcement of values—self-presentation desires. As explained previously, that we can observe results even with a potentially weaker treatment is a testament to the important role of social cues in determining values.

The experimental evidence, though, is potentially narrow in that while it addresses internal validity questions, it cannot necessarily speak to external validity concerns (Shadish et al. 2002). To supplement the experiment, then, I turn to observational, nationally-representative data, and rely on already-established political values (i.e., equality and morality). This next analysis can thus speak to external validity questions about the subject population. Further, and perhaps more importantly, this set of analyses can confront the construct validity question about the particular political values used in the experiment. The experiment—to avoid pretreatment—used a non-salient political value and in doing so increased internal validity but naturally sacrificed some construct validity.[11] This is also where the observational analysis complements the experiment.

Observational Data

Based on my theoretic premises, we should observe that people who have consistent reinforcement from their social groups are more likely to report value positions that are congruent with those of

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[11] In general, research on political values that does not include *all* political values leads to the natural question of how political values differ from each other. It is likely, for example, that the internalization of political values among the public likely differs by how clear social cues are, just as attitudes among the public differ depending on elite signaling (see Levendusky 2010).

their social groups.[12] I consider this possibility using ANES data that tracks people's social contexts. While this approach is only a proxy for the social cues people may receive from others, it offers a useful extension of the experimental study.

Given the uncertainty regarding the homogeneity (see Mason 2018) versus heterogeneity (see Huckfeldt et al. 2004) of political discussions, this set of analyses specifically examines the effect of politically homogeneous social networks (as compared to politically heterogeneous social networks) on individuals' political value endorsements—hypothesizing that having homogeneous networks increases the likelihood that one endorses party congruent political values. This follows from my main argument. If the political value positions people express are socially constructed, this means people are likely to take on the value positions they receive through social cues from their political discussants. In turn, people who have more consistent social cues (i.e., people with politically-homogenous social networks) should have more certainty and clarity in their reported political values. Again, while this is a proxy for the mechanisms proposed in my theory, this analysis acts as an additional check on the experimental results.

In conducting this analysis, I follow previous work on political values. Specifically, the political values used here are equality and morality—values used by Jacoby (2006), Jacoby (2014), Goren (2005), and Goren et al. (2009).[13] In this way, this analysis also extends the empirical tests to other values.

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[12] I am assuming that a homogeneous network indicates a network of the same political party. This is based on past research (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). In the 2000 ANES, Huckfeldt et al. (2004) found that only *4%* of respondents had networks in which everyone disagreed with them (e.g., a Democrat with a full network of Republicans), while 34% of respondents had networks in which everyone agreed with them and 48% of respondents had networks in which no one supported the other party's candidate.

[13] Note that the morality variable is comprised of both the moral tolerance and moral traditionalism values.

Methods. Data are drawn from the 2000 ANES data file, when the main independent variable—homogeneous social networks—was measured. In this particular year, ANES respondents were asked to identify people with whom they discuss "government, elections and politics." Respondents then answered follow-up questions about these people (i.e., their social network), including indicating who they believed each person voted for in the 2000 presidential election. This variable can be used to measure political homogeneity vs. heterogeneity of social networks.

Exercising this dataset, I test whether having a homogeneous social network leads people to be more likely to have party-congruent values. Since I use homogeneous social networks as a proxy for social influence, I predict that there will be a positive, significant effect of homogeneous social networks (*homogeneous network*) on the likelihood one's political values are congruent to their partisanship (*party value congruence*). This would indicate that people endorse the values endorsed by those they discuss politics with, suggesting that values are socially reinforced rather than internal and stable. As this takes my analysis outside the experimental context, potential issues of causality are dealt with in the *Robustness Checks* section.

Measures. The dependent variable in this set of analyses is *party value congruence* and it is comprised of the endorsement of two political values by party congruence: *equality* and *morality*. Both values have two ends—a Democratic end (equality and moral tolerance) and a Republican end (inequality and moral traditionalism).[14] *Equality* is measured with six questions and *morality*

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[14] I discuss these political values and not the additional values from Jacoby (2006, 2014) and Goren et al. (2009) because these are the values available in the ANES dataset. Goren (2005) uses these same values, with one additional value: limited government. My analysis, however, does not make use of this value because it relies on only 3 questions each with only 2 response options (as a

with four, each having response options one to eight, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The full questions can be found in *Appendix B.1*, along with their basic descriptive statistics (also see Goren 2005 for similar operationalizations). These two variables—*equality* and *morality*—are then combined to create the main dependent variable—*party value congruence* ($\alpha=.71$)

Because value endorsement measures are often artificially negatively-skewed (see Goren et al. 2009), I follow previous approaches to ceiling effects (e.g., Caverley and Krupnikov 2017) and code the dependent variable as such: it is 1 if the person is entirely congruent to their partisanship with their values and 0 otherwise. For example, the dependent variable is coded 1 if a Democrat endorses *both* equality and moral tolerance to the *fullest* extent. It is also coded 1 if a Republican rejects equality and endorses moral traditionalism to the *fullest* extent. Deviation from this, such as a Democrat only partially endorsing Democratic values, is coded as 0. Again, this is to correct for the general over-endorsement of values, which leads to a ceiling effect of positive endorsement and masks potential movement within value endorsements (see Goren et al. 2009).

The independent variable of interest is having a politically homogeneous versus heterogeneous social networks. This variable is also binary and is coded as 1 if the social network one reports in the ANES is completely homogenous (i.e., everyone in this network voted for the same president as did the respondent in the 2000 election). It is coded 0 otherwise. Again, this variable is used as a proxy for social influence. This implies, then, that having a politically homogeneous social network should increase the likelihood that one's political values are aligned to their partisanship. For example, if one is a Democrat, discussing politics with other Democrats should increase her endorsement of equality and moral tolerance. Likewise, if one is a Republican,

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comparison, equality relies on 6 questions, each with 8 response options and morality relies on 4 questions, each with 8 response options).

discussing politics with other Republicans should increase the likelihood she rejects equality and moral tolerance. That is, the more homogeneous one's social network is, the more she should align her values to conform to it.

Included in the model are controls that follow from previous political values research (e.g., Jacoby 2006, 2014) and include gender, age, income, race, education, church attendance, ideology, and political knowledge (all coded from 0 to 1). I also control for partisan strength, political interest, political discussions, and media consumption in order to focus on the *specific* effect of homogeneous networks. The coding of all control variables can be found in *Appendix B.1*. Since I predict that the more homogeneous one's network is the more her values will be aligned to her partisanship, we should see that the *homogeneous network* variable has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of *party value congruence*.

Results. Given the structure of the dependent variable, *party value congruence*, I estimate my models using logistic regression and calculating odds ratios for ease of coefficient interpretation. The primary model (Model 1, *N*=583), which includes the aforementioned control variables, is shown below in *Table 2* (see also *Appendix B.2*, *Figure 7* for a visual representation). This table shows that, as predicted, the effect of having a completely politically homogeneous social network—as compared to having any deviation from this—is positive and significant at the *p*<.01 level. Specifically, we can see that moving from having any friends with different political preferences to having *no* friends with different political preferences (i.e., having a fully homogeneous network) increases the odds that a person will have completely congruent values to their partisanship by about 66 percent. That is, a Democrat having only Democratic friends has significantly greater odds of fully endorsing equality and moral tolerance than does a Democrat

having even *one* Republican friend. Or, a Republican having only Republican friends has significantly greater odds of fully rejecting equality and fully endorsing moral traditionalism than does a Republican having even one Democratic friend. These results suggest that, indeed, political values are socially reinforced.

Table 2. Odds Ratios Logistic Regression Predicting Party Value Congruence

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Homogeneous Network	1.661	1.843	1.610	2.005
	(0.307)	(0.590)	(0.307)	(0.524)
Age	0.323	0.0489	0.324	0.329
	(0.213)	(0.0638)	(0.222)	(0.216)
Income	0.650	0.922	0.613	0.669
	(0.454)	(1.287)	(0.456)	(0.465)
Male	0.909	0.877	0.910	0.874
	(0.178)	(0.292)	(0.205)	(0.172)
White	0.777	0.638	0.818	0.781
	(0.340)	(0.520)	(0.381)	(0.341)
Black	0.648	0.868	0.632	0.642
	(0.341)	(0.828)	(0.354)	(0.338)
Hispanic	0.795	1.092	0.789	0.779
	(0.478)	(1.174)	(0.502)	(0.469)
Church	0.634	0.618	0.622	0.639
	(0.201)	(0.334)	(0.208)	(0.202)
Education	1.503	0.579	1.026	1.484
	(0.743)	(0.515)	(0.618)	(0.733)
Strength	1.151	1.029	1.102	1.161
	(0.519)	(0.835)	(0.519)	(0.523)
Ideology	1.581	2.472	1.924	1.547
	(0.565)	(1.586)	(0.714)	(0.553)
Interest	1.312	1.892	1.467	1.314
	(0.429)	(1.095)	(0.496)	(0.430)
Media	1.244	2.777	1.108	1.258
	(0.446)	(1.826)	(0.410)	(0.450)
Discuss	1.014	0.953	0.946	0.929
	(0.325)	(0.573)	(0.316)	(0.300)
Knowledge	0.801	0.938	0.808	0.767
	(0.348)	(0.730)	(0.370)	(0.334)
Constant	0.648	0.911	0.913	0.567
	(0.430)	(1.171)	(0.758)	(0.377)
Observations	583	227	569	583

Standard errors in parentheses

Robustness Checks. There are alternative explanations for these findings, though. One alternative explanation is that those who strongly believe in particular political values will both choose the congruent political party to join *and* choose to have a homogeneous social network. This explanation suggests a different causal relationship in which political value endorsement leads to social networks. A second alternative explanation is that the relationship between homogeneous networks and value endorsement is spurious—that strength of partisanship is moving both networks and value endorsements. Both of these explanations undermine my theoretic expectations, suggesting that it is not social influence that is affecting reported value positions.

Although experimental findings address these alternative explanations by presenting a direct causal connection between social influence and value endorsement, I also attempt to address these with the observational data at hand. I cannot entirely dismiss these possibilities, but I *can* provide evidence that gives them less credence. To do so, I conduct two checks. The first interacts the *partisan strength* variable with the *homogeneous networks* variable, under the assumption that the alternative explanations would likely lead to a significant interaction between these two. Instead, I find no significant interaction (see *Appendix B.2)*. The second relies on an alternative measure of homogeneous social networks that stems from Mutz and Mondak (2006). This alternative measure only focuses on the discussion partners, whom, unlike one's friends, one typically does *not* choose (i.e., coworkers and neighbors, or "accidental discussion partners"). This new *homogeneous networks* variable is coded the same as the original, except it is limited to *only* discussion partners who are "accidental."

The results from this alternative operationalization are shown in *Model 2* (see also *Appendix B.2*, *Figure 5* for a visual representation). We can see here that the more homogeneous

one's "accidental discussion partners"—which can be viewed as discussion partner *assignment* rather than *choice*—the more congruent one's political values are to their partisanship. Note that given the smaller sample size (*N*=227) here, the coefficient is marginally significant (*p*=.056).[15] Nonetheless, the trend aligns with my theoretical predictions, and undermines the idea that people are deliberately choosing networks that align with their values. Again, these analyses do not entirely address causal worries, but the experimental analysis addresses these worries most directly.

I also consider the robustness of the estimates in the primary model in other ways. First, I include additional controls (*Model 3*), as well as recode the independent variable of interest (*homogeneous networks*) as continuous rather than dichotomous (*Model 4*; see *Appendix B.3*, *Figure 6* and *Appendix B.4*, *Figure 10* for respective visual representations).[16] I find no difference in the strength or significance of the effect of *homogeneous networks* on *party value congruence*. Thus, in this analysis I find that the political homogeneity of one's discussion partners influences political value endorsement. Particularly, I find that the more politically homogeneous one's network is, the more likely that person is to endorse party congruent values. This follows from my theoretic predictions.

Next, I recode the dependent variable (*party value congruence*) from binary to both continuous and ordered, and I find the same general results (see *Appendix B.4* for full results and discussion). Finally, I conduct an analysis that examines the effect of political discussions (without accounting for the makeup of discussion partners) on the endorsement of party congruent political

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[15] In fact, only one coefficient in this analysis is significant at conventional levels (age, *p*=.029) and homogeneous networks is the only one that is marginally significant.

[16] To preserve space the two categorical controls (religion and occupation) are included in the model but not in the table (see *Appendix B.3* for these coefficients). Also see *Appendix B.3* for coding of additional control variables.

values. This result largely mimics the results from both the main analysis which accounts for homogenous discussion (see *Appendix C* for full results).

Of course, given the observational nature of the data, we cannot be certain of the causal relationship. Controls are added to both the primary model and to the robustness checks models, but there is always the possibility of omitted variable bias. An alternative explanation of these findings, for example, could be that the people with completely politically homogenous social networks are different than those with more heterogeneous social networks in some *unobservable* (or unmeasured) way—and this, rather than social influence, leads them to adopt more party congruent values. This causal worry is where the experimental results are most insightful—there, I control for the unobservables by random assignment, isolating social cues as the principal independent variable and enhancing the overall validity of the empirics (Shadish et al. 2002).

Discussion

This piece aimed to test the argument that political values are the result of social influence. Specifically, I argued that people adopt the political values of those around them because it looks good to do so. I tested this with both experimental and observational data in attempts to address worries about various validities (see Shadish et al. 2002). In both methods, findings lend empirical support to the theory proposed in this piece. Specifically, leveraging individual differences in the self-monitoring trait and manipulating social cues, the experiment found that people do, in fact, adopt political values because it looks good to do so. Further, relying on the social networks data from the 2000 ANES, the observational analyses implied the social transmission of values outside the experimental context. Essentially, these findings provide evidence of a social dimension to

political values, thus giving doubt to the idea that political values can guide individuals through the complex and manipulative political world.

These results have some limitations, though, which I will attempt to address briefly here. First, a critic might wonder where political independents fit in. The theory does not exclude pure independents and nor does the experiment. However, the observational analysis removes pure independents (it does not remove leaning independents, though). This is simply an artifact of the observational analysis that I use, rather than a reflection of the theory. I do presume that pure independents follow social cues in a manner similar to leaning, weak, and strong partisans—just as many individuals follow the cues of those they like and want to emulate, so would independents. Indeed, research in this area suggests this to be the case (Klar and Krupnikov 2016), as do my experimental patterns.

A second limitation may be conflicting environments. For example, what about a Democrat who also is a churchgoer—this person would likely receive social cues from their Democratic environment to value moral tolerance, but also receive social cues from their church environment to value moral *traditionalism*. Which do they respond to? Here I would theorize that in these types of heterogeneous environments—where people receive competing social cues—individuals are actually the *most* stable in their values (i.e., the *least* influenced by their environment). Essentially, I would hypothesize that so long as people perceive both social groups to be *equally important* to their sense of identity, the social cues would cancel each other out, just as competing frames cancel out framing effects (see Chong and Druckman 2007).

Lastly, one might ask if this theory and research suggest that political values are norms internalized by Democrats and Republicans. I briefly examine this possibility with survey questions at the end of the experiment asking partisans if they would be disappointed in their own

partisans for not valuing their party's values and comparing this to how they would feel towards opposing partisans not valuing that value. I find suggestive evidence that while equality may be a norm in the Democratic culture, self-reliance may not be a norm in the Republican culture. This gives us some insight about *why* people would alter their values to fit in with others—Democrats, at least, punish in-group members for not adhering to their group's equality values. See *Appendix D.1* for this analysis and discussion.

Conclusion

This research carries a number of consequences for research and the conceptualization of political values. As Seligman and Katz (1996) aptly note, "If value or value types do reorder themselves across situations, then we must ask what purpose the general value system serves." Indeed, research relies on the notion that constructs are correctly defined and operationalized—doubts to the contrary should be given attention, especially if those constructs are as widely used as political values.

Beyond the implications of these findings for research in political science, though, these findings have consequences for the practice of politics. First, the findings speak to how well individuals can reason through politics—if they can work their way through outside influence from elites, the media, and the social world to make reasonably independent decisions. Remember, if the populous does not hold stable values that guide their political decisions, the government will have trouble translating majority preferences into policies (Valentino and Nardis 2013). Unquestionably, this mitigates the effectiveness of any democratic government and lends doubt to the optimistic possibility that values can guide individuals through new political decisions, especially in the face of outside influence. Further, these findings give us some insight into the

causes of ideological polarization. While some have claimed ideological polarization to be the result of a "culture war," or a direct competition of political values (e.g., Berlin 1969; Chong 2000; Jacoby 2014; Stone 2012), my findings suggest that some ideological polarization is the result of homophily and social interactions—i.e., social polarization (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Mason 2015, 2018)—where social polarization leads to increased ideological polarization, rather than the other way around.

Of course, there are possibilities that could suggest these results are not so severe to the practice of politics. It may be possible, for example, that while political values are not our political guides, other considerations can lead individuals through politics and prevent manipulation by elites, the media, and social influence. It is even possible that we have *political values* that are these considerations, but that the political values we have been measuring are not them (i.e., political scientists have been measuring a different construct and there are other latent political values that we are not measuring). This manuscript, though, is responding to research on political values *as we know them*, rather than attempting to measure a new latent concept—it cannot speak to whether there are political values that we have not "discovered" yet. In essence, these possibilities question the construct validity of our research on political values, and it is one that we have dealt with for decades. As Converse (1964) explains, "Belief systems have never surrendered easily to empirical study or quantification." I should note, in closing, that even if either of these possibilities were the case, while the practice of politics may be saved, research relying on political values would remain precarious.

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