

Not-so-free speech: Support for violent protests across the political divide

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Background and relevance

- In 2017, college campuses were the site of various extreme protests surrounding free speech (Cohen, 2017).
- Individuals who are “fused” are more likely to engage in extreme behaviors on behalf of their group/cause (Swann et al., 2009)
- Willingness to engage in extreme behaviors increases with the amount of exposure to radical content (see Hassen et al., 2018 for a review)
- The effect of political orientation on violent protests is highly debated (Lost, 2017; Crawford, 2014)

Hypothesis

- Individuals who are highly fused to their group and/or cause will report greater support and willingness to engage in violent protests.
- Exposure to a pro-violent protest in-group consensus on social media will result in greater support and willingness to engage in violent protests.
- An interaction between fusion with the group and/or cause and consensus condition on support and willingness to engage in violent protests.

Design Overview & Methods

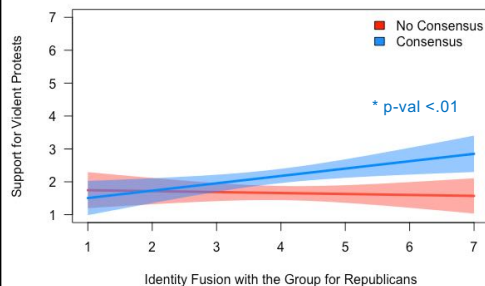
- Online survey via Prolific that assessed & manipulated:
 - Perceived Group Consensus (IV)
 - Manipulated with pro/anti violent protest tweets from members of their group*
 - Identity Fusion with Group & Cause (IV)
 - Political Orientation (IV)
 - Support for Violent Protests (DV1)
 - Willingness to engage in Violent Protests (V2)
- n = 468
 - 231 Republicans & 237 Democrats

*Sample pro-violent democratic tweet

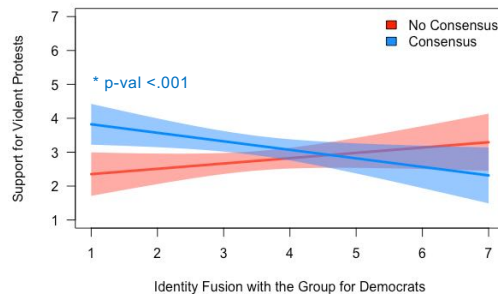


3-Way Interaction Effects on Support for Violent Protest: Identity Fusion with the Group X Consensus Condition X Political Orientation

Visualization of the three-way regression (p-val < .001)



Significant positive interaction between identity fusion with the group and consensus condition for republicans.



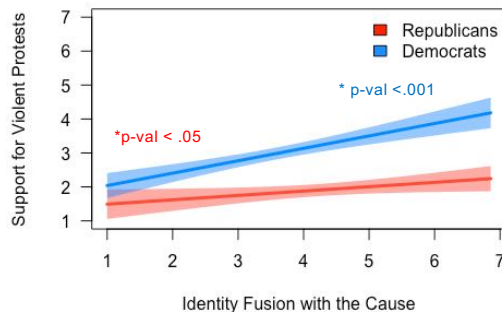
Significant negative interaction between identity fusion with the group and consensus condition for democrats.

2-Way Interaction Effects Support for Violent Protest: Identity Fusion with the Cause X Political Orientation

Significant positive interactions between identity fusion with the cause and political orientation.

The Interaction effect is significantly stronger for democrats (p-val < .001) than for republicans (p-val < .05).

Visualization of the two-way regression (p-val < .01)



Summary of Results

Interaction between fusion with the group and consensus condition dependent upon political orientation.

Effect of fusion with the cause stronger for democrats (p-val < .001) than for republicans (p-val < .05)

Main effect of political orientation on support for violent protests (p-val < .001)

- Democrats; $m = 2.97$
- Republicans; $m = 1.90$

Conclusions

- The significant effect of political orientation was unexpected given the divided literature (Jost, 2017; Crawford, 2014).
 - Overall democrats reported greater support for violent protests.
- Further research needed to understand the exact mechanism driving the difference between the three-way and two-way interactions for republicans and democrats.

References

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