

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

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Honors Research Proposal

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### **Abstract**

Intergroup violence is a frequent occurrence in society. That college campuses have recently been the site of numerous violent protests is indicative of a growing need to further our knowledge of what leads to violent group behavior. According to the theory of identity fusion, ‘fused’ individuals, whose personal identities have become deeply immersed in their group and or cause, are more likely to engage in radical behavior on behalf of the group. In addition, radicalism and violent intentions have been found to increase with exposure to homogenous online extremist groups. Little to no research has been conducted on the effect of perceived group consensus, that is, the belief that members of one’s group agree and support a course of action, on endorsement of violent extremism. Furthermore, political ideology has yet to be explored as a factor that influences radical group behavior. This study seeks to fill this gap through examining the effects of perceived group consensus, identity fusion with a group and cause, and political orientation on the support of violent protest behavior, as well as individual intentions to participate in violent protests. An online survey was completed by 468 participants who self-identified as either Republican or Democrat. Our data yielded interesting results for the variable of political orientation. Republicans who were strongly fused to their political party were more likely to support violent protests after viewing the consensus manipulation and less likely to give their support if they were in the no consensus condition. Weakly fused Democrats reported greater support for violent protests when shown the consensus manipulation than strongly fused Democrats. Democrats and Republicans both showed an increased support for violent protests if they were highly fused with their respective causes; however, this effect was significantly stronger for Democrats.

In February of 2017, Milo Yiannopoulos, a controversial right-wing activist, was scheduled to speak at UC Berkeley. His presence was the subject of heated debate on campus, and the university spent thousands of dollars on extensive security measures. The speech was eventually interrupted by masked, black-clad protestors who threw commercial-grade fireworks, rocks, Molotov cocktails, pepper-sprayed the crowd, and smashed the windows of buildings on campus. This night of chaos resulted in \$100,000 of damages to the campus, a total of six injured people, and one arrest. This incident is one of the many violent, aggressive protests to arise on college campuses in the past decade (McLaughlin, 2017).

Exacerbated by the growing political polarization, college campuses have been the site of violent protests responding to issues of free speech (Cohen, 2017; Westfall, Van Bowen, Chambers, & Judd, 2015). Violent protests suggest the willingness of individuals to engage in extreme, violent behavior on behalf of their group. Intergroup violence is not a new or uncommon phenomenon, as it has been a part of human history since we segregated into tribes (Kelly, 2005). The question of why this violence occurs has been explored in a variety of ways; however, continues to be incompletely understood. The theory of identity fusion holds that the boundaries between an individual's personal self and their group identity can become permeable, resulting in a case of identity fusion (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015). These 'fused' individuals experience a visceral sense of oneness with the group and show a greater willingness to engage in extreme pro-group behaviors than their non-fused counterparts (Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Huici, & Morales, 2009). This may lead to a cycle of violence, in which group identification motivates participation in collective violence and violent behavior, which then serves to increase the individual's identification with the group (Littman & Paluck, 2015; Littman, 2018). Endorsement for extremism has been found to be amplified by active exposure to radicalism on social media

(Pauwels & Hardyns, 2018). The false consensus effect, the overestimation of public support for your views, appears to underlie this relationship between violent extremism and involvement in extremist groups online. For instance, extremist groups, such as neo-Nazis, are more likely to exhibit a false consensus effect that increases with their levels of participation in online radical groups (Wojcieszak, 2008; Wojcieszak, 2010). While the effects of false consensus have garnered research attention, the impact of perceived group consensus, the extent to which one believes one's group supports a view, on the extreme behavior of the individual has yet to be studied at length.

In this study, we will examine the impact of perceived group consensus, identity fusion, and political orientation on the endorsement of violent protest behavior. We expect that group members, perhaps motivated by a desire to display their loyalty to the group's collective aims, may enact extreme actions when they are convinced that such actions will meet with the groups' approval. Thus, the current study expands the literature by examining the impact of perceived group consensus, as well as the potential effects of political orientation, on violent protest behavior.

### **Collective Violence**

A majority of humans disapprove of violence and report that they avoid causing harm to their fellow man (Grossman, 1996). Human history is nevertheless full of examples of collective violence perpetrated on behalf of groups, including horrific acts such as the Armenian and Rwandan Genocide, and the two world wars that have occurred in the twentieth century alone. Given that most individuals do not desire to harm others, individuals on their own are unable to account for the horrific violence seen through human history (Taylor, 2009). Researchers have

long sought to understand why people that lack any mental illness or abnormality participate in such violence. There has been much research on the reasons for individual participation in collective violence, as well as the consequences of such behavior (see Littman & Paluck, 2015 for a review). Based on interviews with Liberian and Ugandan ex-combatants, Littman (2018) concluded that violence is cyclical in nature. Individuals who highly identified with the group were more likely to have committed violence for their group. In addition, the more collective violence one participated in, the more their identity with the group increased. Thus, a cycle of collective violence was created, increasing identification, as well as willingness to engage in extremism with every radical act (Littman, 2018; Littman & Paluck, 2015). This emphasis on identification as a key factor in the participation of collective violence draws us to examine the group.

### **Identity Fusion and the Group**

A key to an individual's participation in collective violence is the extent to which an individual identifies with his or her group. The more an individual's self-concept revolves around the group identity, the more they will be willing to commit costly acts for the group (Littman, 2018; Littman & Paluck, 2015). Group members who are deeply aligned, or "fused with", the group experience a visceral sense of oneness with the group (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Swann, Jetten, Gomez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012; Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Huici, & Morales, 2009). Fusion is distinct from strongly identifying with a group, for among fused individuals the boundaries between their personal self and the group are porous. To someone who is fused, to fight for the group is to also fight for themselves and their personal identity (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Swann et al., 2012; Swann et al., 2009). Fused individuals are more likely to engage in extreme behavior, such as committing violence or sacrificing their lives, on behalf of

the group (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Swann et al., 2012; Swann et al., 2009). They are also more willing to protect and forgive group members who have behaved in immoral ways if they believe that there is risk to the group's reputation (Ashokkumar, Galaif, & Swann, 2019; Swann et al., 2009). The groups and causes one can be fused with are highly variable. In local fusion, small groups of individuals develop relational ties that bond the members, while in extended fusion, relational ties are projected onto a larger collective, despite the absence of personal relations within the group (Swann et al., 2012). For example, an individual can be fused to environmentalism, believing that other environmentalists are akin to family members and worth dying for, undeterred by the fact they have and most likely will never personally meet every individual who identifies as an environmentalist. Additionally, individuals who are fused feel a strong desire to stay within the good graces and favor of their group, making them sensitive to the goals and beliefs of their group (Ashokkumar et al., 2019). For instance, extreme religious beliefs may serve as a motivating factor behind violence, with some individuals engaging in collective violence as a way to signal their devotion to their group and/or deity, effectively increasing their status in the religious hierarchy (Milla, Putra, & Umam, 2019; Breslawski & Ives, 2019).

Intergroup conflict, that is, competition and strife between groups, is another prominently studied concept that contributes to collective violence. Intergroup conflict contributes to violence between groups, as well as to the radicalization of groups (Littman & Paluck, 2015; Moghaddam, 2018). At the heart of intergroup conflict is the belief that individuals outside of one's group are host to stereotypical negative qualities, creating a negative intergroup bias. For example, some argue that when these biases become blatant and overwhelming, hate crimes and violence are born from this conflict (Fiske, 2002). In many cases, collective violence can serve

as a mechanism to fight against the outgroup. For instance, violence can serve as a mechanism to fight for the group's social and/or political aims, with individuals being motivated by their perceived lack of resources compared to the out-group (LaFree, Jensen, James, & Safer-Lichtenstein, 2018). Intergroup conflict has the potential to escalate and effect the legislative process in various forms of political violence.

### **Political Violence and Protests**

Political violence is motivated by a desire to attain a group's social and/or political aims. Extreme cases of political violence include acts of terrorism, genocide, warfare, and insurgency, while less extreme cases include violent protests and/or demonstrations (Littman & Paluck, 2015; LaFree, Jensen, James, & Safer-Lichtenstein, 2018). The number of radical peers one associates with appears to significantly affect an individual's participation in political extremism, as those who affiliate with radical groups are more likely to engage in extremist behaviors (LaFree et al., 2018). Additionally, those in late adolescence and young adulthood are more likely to engage in acts of terrorism and radical violence (Flaherty, 2003), and individuals who have greater sensation-seeking behaviors were more likely to act as agents of political violence at a greater rate than their counterparts (Schumpe, Belanger, Moyano, & Nisa, 2018).

In the United States, the rate of perceived political polarization is rapidly increasing, especially for those who identify as strongly Democratic or Republican (Westfall, Van Bowen, Chambers, & Judd, 2015). This growing ideological divide has resulted in many political clashes in recent years; for instance, the aforementioned violent protest that ensued as a result of Milo Yiannopoulos's scheduled appearance at UC Berkeley in 2017 (McLaughlin, 2017). Propelled by the growing political polarization, the college campus free speech issue, that is the debate on if

all or only select figures should be allowed to speak on campus, has spawned many protests, both peaceful and violent (Cohen, 2017). There is much debate on whether political ideology has an impact on political violence. Some argue that liberals and conservatives are guilty of symmetrical levels of intergroup prejudice and distaste for those who are ideologically dissimilar (Crawford, 2014), while others point out that there are dispositional differences between the two ideologies, such as need for order, tolerance for ambiguity, and threat sensitivity (Jost, 2017).

When protestors engage in violent acts on behalf of their group, the perceived legitimacy of their protest significantly decreases. Bystanders, unaffiliated with the cause, are less likely to engage in protest and will not support the cause when violent tactics are utilized (Yin, 2018). The question of how political protests turn violent has been explored in a limited capacity, mainly through examining dynamics between police and protestors that contribute to the incitement of violence. Researchers argue that violent political protests are often caused by the interactions of police and protests, and that the emergence of violence in protests can be purely situational (Kritzer, 1977; Nassauer, 2018). While these studies seem to highlight that the interactions between opposing groups can impact the rise of violent protests, it is also imperative to examine how the communication that occurs between group members may influence radical group behavior.

### **Social Media & Consensus**

The influence of social media on violence is a relatively unexplored area. There have been studies on how social media use is connected to individual or “lone wolf” violence (Cohen, Johnasson, Kaati, & Mork, 2014), but not on its role in collective violence. This leaves a major knowledge gap surrounding a likely connection to collective violence. Social media is currently



the main method of communication for many young adults. Furthermore, it is an important outlet for expressing political views and connecting with like-minded individuals (Liberat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). While there is evidence to suggest that social media use can serve to expose individuals to ideologically diverse viewpoints (Barbera, Jost, Nagler, Tucker, & Bonneau, 2015), it is important to recognize the potential for social media to work in opposite ways that serve to increase intergroup biases and extremist beliefs. Most individuals are likely to encounter negative material centered on race and ethnicity while they use social media; however, only those actively seeking such material seem to be impacted by exposure (Costello, Hawdon, Ratliff, & Grantham, 2016; Pauwels & Schils, 2016). Many studies have explored how exposure to extremist content online increases support and willingness to engage in radical behavior (see Hassan et al., 2018 for a review). Extremist beliefs have been found to increase with levels of active social media exposure and self-reported political aggression (Pauwels & Hardyns, 2018). Neo-Nazi extremism also increases with online participation by exacerbating the false consensus effect, that is, an overestimation of public support for your views (Wojcieszak, 2008; Wojcieszak, 2010). Online participation by neo-Nazis in extremist groups increases their belief that the public supports their radical opinions. (Wojcieszak, 2008; Wojcieszak, 2010).

The impact of the false consensus effect draws attention to the importance of consensus when it comes to individual behavior. Prior research on consensus mainly examines its impact on intergroup biases and attitudes; for example, when confronted with an unfamiliar issue, people are more likely to formulate an opinion based on public consensus (Sechrist & Stangor, 2007; Sechrist & Stangor, 2001). Furthermore, individuals with low intragroup status are more likely to engage in conformist behaviors and tailor their actions to better assimilate with the group (Jetten, Hornsey, & Advares-Yorno, 2006). Therefore, there is evidence to suggest that the

individuals do conform to the ideals of society and/or their group when they are relatively low on the social ladder or are tasked with understanding foreign concepts (Sechrist & Stangor, 2007; Sechrist & Stangor, 2001; Jetten et al., 2006). However, little to no research has been done to explore the effect of perceived group consensus on the violent intentions and behaviors of the individual.

## **Conclusion**

Prior research on collective violence is relatively sparse and incomplete. Collective violence has been identified as cyclical, as violence begets more violence through increasing group identification (Littman, 2018). Furthermore, individuals who are highly fused and assimilated in the group are more likely to engage in extreme behaviors on behalf of the group and/or cause (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Swann et al., 2012; Swann et al, 2009). Politics is a common arena in which intergroup violence plays out, and political extremism becomes more likely with greater political polarization (LaFree et al., 2018). Given the rapidly increasing perceived political polarization in the United States (Westfall et al., 2015), it is therefore extremely important to understand what causes political violence. Violent protests are a common form of political extremism; however, they are less effective at advancing the aims of the group compared to peaceful protests (Yin, 2018). While some research has explored the situational interactions between police and protestors that lead to the outbreak of violence (Nassauer, 2018), there has yet to be an exploration of how communication among group members can influence participation in violent protests. There has also been a neglect of the contribution of social media in collective violence. Social media is not only the main method of communication for many young adults, but also a crucial outlet for the expression of political views and connecting with in-group members (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchick, 2019). Finally, many studies have explored

how the exposure of extremist in-group content increases support and willingness to engage in radical behavior (see Hassan et al., 2018 for a review); however, the specific mechanism by which these messages influence the extreme intentions and behavior has yet to be examined.

This study seeks to explore how manipulating a perceived group consensus for violent protests on social media affects an individual's endorsement of, and willingness to engage in, violent protests. In addition to group consensus, we will be examining the impact of identity fusion on the endorsement of violent behavior and sensitivity to the consensus manipulation. We anticipate that individuals who are highly fused to their group will be more sensitive to group consensus manipulation, and thus show more willingness to endorse violent behavior than their non-fused counterparts. Furthermore, we will examine political identification as a possible factor in the endorsement of violent protests.

## Methods

Liberal and Conservative college aged (18 to 24 years) participants were recruited via Prolific, an online survey platform, for an online survey. Participants learned of the violent protests that have spawned from the debate of free speech on college campuses. They viewed a series of 8 twitter posts from members of their political group on the topic. Participants were randomly assigned to either condition based on the tweets shown. In the group consensus condition, all of the tweets shown endorsed violent protests as the best method to achieve the group's goals, while in the no consensus condition, the participants were shown a variety of tweets from group members, some in support of violent protests and some that condemned them. Subjects were then asked a series of questions probing their intent to participate in future violent protests, as well as if they believed that those engaging in the protests are justified and deserve support. The primary independent variable is the consensus conditions: pro-violent group consensus and no consensus. The dependent variable is the endorsement and willingness to engage in violent protest behavior measured by self-report questions at the end of the study. Secondary independent variables include identity fusion with the group (*Democrat/Republican*), identity fusion cause (*Pro-Free Speech/Anti-Hate Speech*), and political orientation. The study hypothesis is that when exposed to a group consensus endorsing violent protests on social media, participants will show more support and willingness to engage in violent protests. Furthermore, strongly fused individuals, to whom their group and/or cause is extremely personally salient, will display a greater endorsement of violence when shown the consensus manipulation.

## Participants

Participants (n = 468) were recruited through Prolific, an online survey platform. Only participants who identify as either a Democrat or Republican were used for the survey. The

survey was only sent to those on Prolific that have identified themselves as liberal or conservative. An additional demographic question asking them to choose their political orientation was asked to ensure political ideology. There will be three options: *Democrat*, *Republican*, *neither*. Participants who chose neither as their answer were excluded from the study. A relatively equal number of Democrat ( $n = 237$ ) and Republican ( $n = 231$ ) subjects were split between the consensus and no consensus conditions. They were informed at the end of the survey that all information and social media posts were created for the use of the study and compensated \$1 for their participation in the survey.

## **Materials and Measures**

### **Perceived Group Consensus & Twitter Posts**

Perceived group consensus was manipulated by showing subjects 8 twitter posts. In the consensus condition, all posts endorsed violent protests as the best way to achieve the group's aims, while in the no consensus condition, the twitter posts were evenly split between those that condoned and those that condemned violent protest behavior. Participants were told that the twitter posts were from real members of their political party, but that names, pictures, likes, retweets, and replies were changed for anonymity and neutrality.

The twitter posts were generated using GenTweet.com, which is updated for the latest style of twitter. All twitter posts were modelled off of tweets found under the following hashtags and keyword searches: #violentprotests, #protests, #violence, #freespeech. Names and usernames were blurred out to be illegible, the profile picture on the twitter post was left blank, and the detailed response information (i.e. likes, retweets, and replies) was averaged. Twitter posts were coded based on political orientation (*Democrat*, *Republican*, *Neutral*) and endorsement of violent protests (*Pro-Violent*, *Anti-Violent*). All tweets were pre-tested in a two pilot studies ( $n = 40$ ) to

ensure readability, interest, and believability for both republicans and democrats. A compilation of all of the tweets for each of the four conditions can be found in Appendices A through D.

### **Identity Fusion**

A verbal measure was used to measure identity fusion (Gómez, Brooks, Buhrmester, Vázquez, Jetten, & Swann, 2011). The verbal scale of identity fusion consists of a series of 7 statements that participants will report their agreement to from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). Two fusion measures were utilized to separately assess identity fusion with the group and identity fusion with the cause. For fusion with the group, subjects responded to measures asking about their political party. For fusion with the cause, republicans were shown items that assessed their fusion to the pro-free speech cause, while democrats were shown items that assessed their fusion to the anti-hate speech cause. Separate average scores were created for each participant for identity fusion with the group and identity fusion with the cause. In graphs, those who were 1+ standard deviation above the mean were considered to be highly fused, while those who 1-SD were treated as weakly fused. The verbal measure of identity fusion with the group and cause can be found in Appendix E and F.

### **Violent Protest Intentions**

The primary dependent variables are the subject's willingness to engage in and support for violent protests. Participants were asked to rate their agreement to 8 questions assessing support for and willingness to engage in violent protests that were scaled from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). Items 1 through 4 assess support for violent protests, while items 4 through 8 assess willingness to personally engage in violent protests. Scores for violent protest support were generated by averaging the responses for items 1 through 3. Scores for violent

protests intentions were made through averaging the response for items 4 through 8. A full list of the questions can be found in Appendix G.

### **Procedure**

This study used an online survey to gather responses from participants. Surveys were distributed on Prolific. In the beginning of the online survey, participants responded to the measures on political orientation and identity fusion with political party. They were then informed of the current issues surrounding free speech on college campuses, as well as the respective causes (*Pro-Free Speech/Anti-Hate Speech*) commonly taken by republicans and democrats on this issue. After the information summary, they responded to a measure of identity fusion with the cause. Participants were then shown 8 twitter posts from members of their political group. In the consensus condition, all of the tweets endorsed violent protests as a way to achieve the group's larger aims. In the no consensus condition, the tweets both endorsed and condemned the violent protests. They were then asked to respond to the dependent variables of their support for and willingness to engage in violent protests. Specifically, they were asked to elaborate on their support for violent protests as a good way to achieve the group's goals, as well as their willingness to personally engage in violent protests. At the end of the study, they received an informed consent debriefing.

### **Expected Outcomes**

We anticipated main effects for consensus and identity fusion. We expected individuals in the consensus condition to report a greater endorsement for and willingness to engage in violent protests than those presented with no consensus. We expected that highly fused individuals would be more willing to personally engage in violent protests for their group than their non-fused counterparts. Further, we anticipated an interaction between fusion and

consensus, with fused individuals showing a higher sensitivity to the consensus manipulation and reporting a greater willingness to engage and endorse violent protests when presented with an in-group consensus. We foresaw multiple possibilities for how political orientation would impact endorsement of violent protests. It was possible that there would be no significant effect of political ideology, with liberals and conservatives responding similarly to the manipulation. It was also possible that there would be an effect of political orientation, with liberals or conservatives differing in their endorsement of violent protests. An interaction between political orientation and fusion or political orientation and consensus was also a possibility, but we anticipated this as highly unlikely.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data was analyzed with a linear regression approach. To do this, we utilized R studio for all data analysis and visualization purposes. For each dependent variable, we examined the highest order interaction among the independent variables. For the sake of the analyses, we separated fusion with the group and fusion with the cause in the regressions. We ran the regression of fusion the group, consensus condition, and political orientation on the dependent variables of support for violent protests and violent protests intentions respectively. For fusion with the cause, we ran the three-way interaction with consensus condition and political orientation on the dependent variables. For support for violent protests, we also ran the two-way interactions between fusion with the cause and political orientation. For violent protests intentions, we ran each order of regression until examining the main effect of political orientation. When a significant interaction emerged, we decomposed it using a simple slope analysis.



## Results

### *Interaction of political orientation and fusion with the cause on support for violent protests*

A significant two-way interaction between political orientation and fusion with cause on support for violent protests was found ( $p\text{-val} < .01$ , see Table 1). A visualization of the regression is plotted in Figure 1. The graphs show that the effect of fusion with a cause is significant for both political parties. Both Republicans and Democrats who were strongly fused to their respective causes reported greater support for violent protests than their weakly fused counterparts; however, a simple slope analysis reveals that this effect is much stronger for Democrats ( $b = 0.37$ ,  $B = 0.064$ ,  $t\text{-val} = 5.70$ ,  $p\text{-val} < .001$ ) than Republicans ( $b = 0.13$ ,  $\beta = 0.063$ ,  $t\text{-val} = 2.0473$ ,  $p\text{-val} < .05$ ).

**Table 1:** Regression between Fusion Cause X Political Orientation

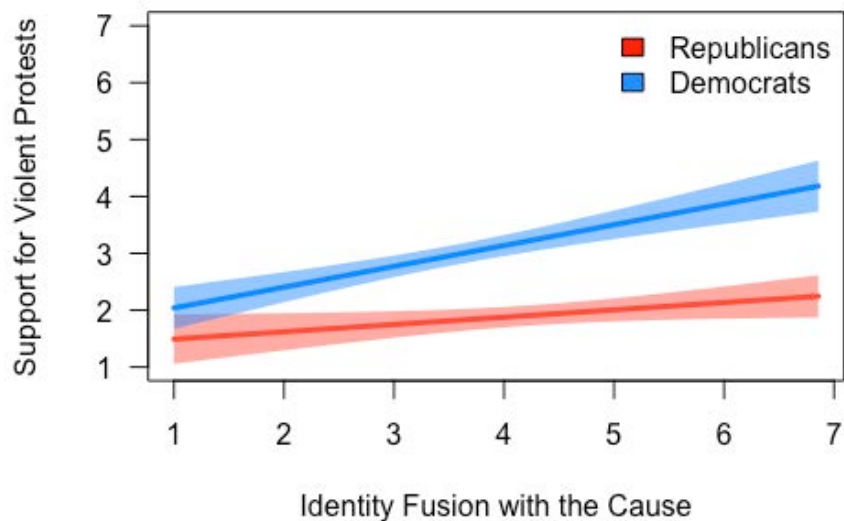
	95% Confidence Interval for $b$					
	$b$	Lower	Upper	$\beta$	$t\text{-value}$	$p$
(Intercept)	1.67	1.19	2.16	0.25	6.809	<0.001
Fusion Cause	0.37	0.24	0.49	0.06	5.703	<0.001
Political	-0.31	-1.04	0.42	0.37	-0.833	0.405
Fusion Cause X Political Orientation	-0.24	-0.41	-0.06	0.09	-2.645	0.008

F(3, 464) = 35.7

R<sup>2</sup> / R<sup>2</sup> adjusted = 0.188 / 0.182

P-value < .001

Note. Two-Way Interaction significant at the .001 level



**Figure 1.** Visualization of the regression for the two-way interaction of fusion with a cause and political orientation on support for violent protests. Higher fusion with a cause for both Republican and Democratic participants correlates to greater support for violent protests; however, this effect is much stronger from Democrats ( $p\text{-val} < .001$ ) than for Republicans ( $p\text{-val} < .05$ )

*Interaction of political orientation, fusion with the group, and consensus*

A significant three-way interaction between political orientation, fusion with political party, and consensus was found impacting support for violent protests ( $p\text{-val} < .001$ ; see Table 1).

Visualizations of the interaction between fusion with political party and consensus are plotted on Figure 2 for Democrats and Figure 3 for Republicans. The graphs display that the interaction between fusion with the group and consensus are significant for both Republicans and Democrats; however, a simple slope analysis of the regressions show that this interaction is negative for Democrats ( $b = -0.25$ ,  $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $t\text{-val} = -2.59$ ,  $p\text{-val} < .01$ ) and positive for republicans ( $b = .79$ ,  $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $t\text{-val} = 3.28$ ,  $p\text{-val} < .01$ ). Weakly fused Democrats who viewed the consensus condition reported greater support for violent protests than fused Democrats in the consensus manipulation. In contrast, fused Republicans who viewed the consensus manipulation

reported a greater support for violent protests than fused Republicans who viewed the no consensus manipulation.

**Table 1:** Regression between Group Fusion X Political Orientation X Consensus

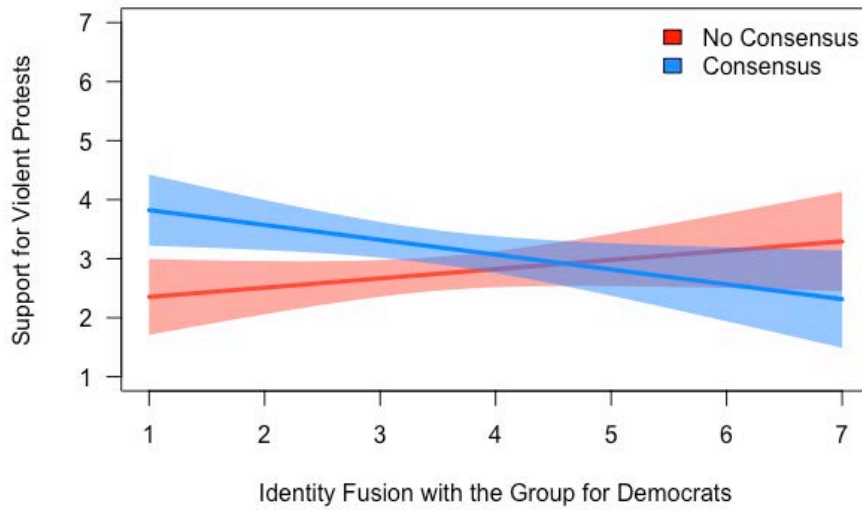
	95% Confidence Interval for <i>b</i>					
	<i>b</i>	Lower	Upper	$\beta$	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	4.07	3.37	4.78	0.38	5.75	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
Condition	-1.88	-2.91	-0.85	1.88	3.59	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
Fusion Group	-0.25	-0.44	-0.06	0.16	1.54	0.125
Political Orientation	-2.79	-3.86	-1.73	0.57	-0.74	0.462
Condition X Fusion Group	0.41	0.13	0.69	0.14	-2.90	<b>0.004</b>
Condition X Political Orientation	2.37	0.82	3.92	0.79	-3.011	<b>0.003</b>
Fusion Group X Political Orientation	0.48	0.20	0.75	0.14	-1.30	0.195
Fusion Group X Political Orientation X Consensus	-0.66	-1.50	-0.27	0.20	3.32	<b>0.001</b>

F(7, 460) = 13.79

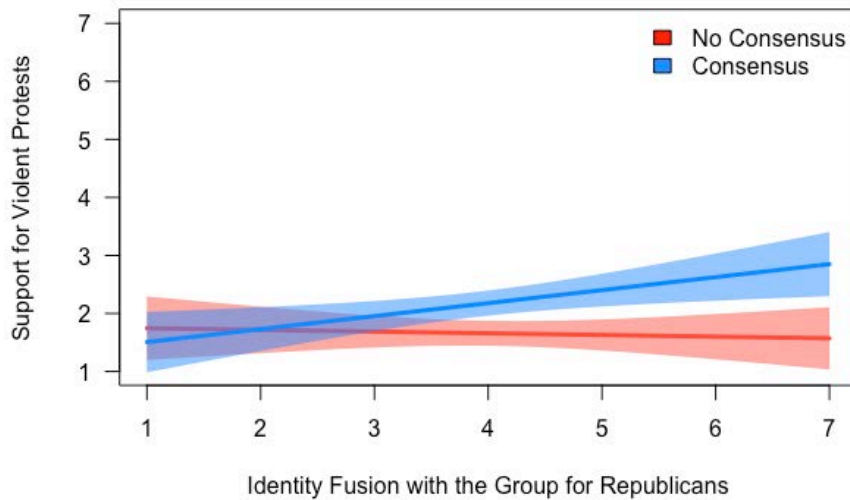
R<sup>2</sup> / R<sup>2</sup> adjusted = 0.173 / 0.161

P-value < .001

Note. Three-way interaction significant at the .001 level.



**Figure 2.** Visualization of the negative interaction ( $p\text{-val} < .01$ ) between fusion with political party and consensus on support for violent protests for Democrats. Weakly fused Democrats report greater support for violent protests compared to their fused counterparts after viewing the consensus manipulation.



**Figure 3.** Visualization of the positive interaction ( $p\text{-val} < .01$ ) between fusion with political party and consensus on support for violent protests for Republicans. Fused Republicans who viewed the consensus manipulation reported greater support for violent protests compared to those in the no consensus manipulation.

*Main effect of political orientation on violent protest support and intentions*

A significant main effect of political orientation on support for violent protests and willingness to engage in violent protests was also found ( $p\text{-val} < .001$ ). A Welch Two Sample t-test ( $t\text{-val} = -8.12$ ,  $p\text{-val} < .001$ ) confirms that Democrats ( $m = 2.98$ ,  $sd = 1.62$ ) self-reported significantly greater support for violent protests than Republicans ( $m = 1.90$ ,  $sd = 1.21$ ). Furthermore, another Welch Two Sample t-test ( $t\text{-val} = -3.60$ ,  $p\text{-val} < .001$ ) supports that Democrats ( $m = 2.12$ ,  $sd = 1.36$ ) reported a significantly greater willingness to engage in violent protests than Republicans ( $m = 1.72$ ,  $sd = 1.00$ ).

## Discussion

We hypothesized that the variables of perceived group consensus and identity fusion would both have main effects, as well as interact, to influence support for and willingness to engage in violent protests. We made no predictions for political orientation given the divided literature on the topic and treated the variable as exploratory (Jost, 2017; Crawford, 2014). The results of the linear regressions show that political orientation was the unexpected driving force in the significant effect of fusion with the cause and the interaction between consensus and fusion with the group.

### *Main Effect of Political Orientation*

Political orientation was the strongest variable when it comes to influencing violent protest support and intentions, with Democrats reporting a greater overall support than Republicans. However, it is important to note that the group means for the dependent variables are relatively low; therefore, while statistically significant differences between the political orientations are present, it cannot be said that one group is strongly endorsing violent protests. Besides the significant main effect of political orientation on both dependent variables, a significant effect of fusion with a cause, as well as an interaction between fusion with the group and consensus, on support for violent protests was present when political orientation was taken into account.

### *Interaction between Fusion with the Cause and Political Orientation*

Findings from previous studies on identity fusion, as well as our study hypothesis that predicted identity fusion would result in greater violent protest endorsement, were supported by the interaction between fusion with the cause and political orientation (Swann & Buhrmester,

2015; Swann et al., 2012; Swann et al., 2009). Fusion with the cause positively influenced support for violent protests in both political orientations; however, this effect was significantly stronger for Democrats than Republicans. While the predicted effects of fusion anticipated, the extreme differences between republicans and democrats was unexpected and unaccounted for in the study hypothesis.

#### *Interaction between Political Orientation, Group Fusion, and Consensus*

The three-way interaction between political orientation, fusion with political party, and consensus was another unexpected result. The interaction between fusion with the group and consensus was significant for both political orientations; however, the interaction was negative for Democrats and positive for Republicans. The study hypothesis that fusion and consensus would interact to yield greater support for violent protests was supported by the Republican data; however, for Democrats the interaction was inverse of our expectations. Fused Republicans who viewed the consensus manipulation reported a greater support for violent protests than fused Republicans who viewed the no consensus manipulation. In contrast, weakly fused Democrats who viewed the consensus manipulation did report a greater support for violent protests than when they viewed the no consensus condition; however, this positive effect decreased as fusion with the group increased, with fused Democrats reporting less support than their non-fused counterparts when they were exposed to a pro-violent protest consensus. The Republican data is consistent with previous studies on fusion and consensus; however, the negative relationship we see between fusion and consensus for the Democratic participants is relatively inconsistent with findings from previous studies (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Swann et al., 2012; Swann et al., 2009; see Hassen et al., 2018 for a review).

### *The Unexpected Effect of Political Orientation*

There could be various reasons we see political orientation driving all of the interactions and effects in the study. Firstly, we chose to frame this study within the issue of free speech on college campuses (Cohen, 2017). The use of a real situation, in which a majority of the protests have been driven by students who identify as Democrats, could influence the participants' responses through their preconceived ideas of the campus free speech protests (McLaughlin, 2017). These situational characteristics could be part of the reason we see such a stark difference between Democrats who are fused to their political party versus Democrats who are fused to the cause of anti-hate speech (Crawford; 2014). Those who feel fused with the cause specifically related to this issue of free speech report a greater support for violent protests, than those who simply feel fused to the Democratic party. Secondly, there is the possibility that the causes we used in this study (*Pro-Free Speech/ Anti-Hate Speech*) are creating unexpected effects by their pro and anti-nature. In the Anti-Hate Speech cause, the individuals are formed to fight *against* an opposing force that wishes to do harm. While in the Pro-Free Speech cause, people are rallied in *support* of something that they believe in. It is possible that the *anti* nature of the democratic cause is what is driving the differences we see in the two-way interaction of fusion with a cause and political orientation. Given the unexpected nature of the results, as well as the complicated framing of the situation, it is difficult to fully understand if the differences we see between Republicans and Democrats in this study are due to situational or dispositional characteristics (Jost, 2017; Crawford; 2014).

### *Implication & Limitations*

Due to the highly significant, yet unexpected results, more data is necessary to begin to understand the mechanism driving the differences between Republicans and Democrats in this



study. We have outlined a few of the many potential reasons that we are seeing this significant difference between the two groups, yet further research is crucial to draw more concrete conclusions. There are a few significant limitations in this study. First, we chose to create and add people to causes without allowing them to choose. We automatically placed Democrats into the Anti-Hate Speech cause and Republicans into the Pro-Free Speech Cause. Given the substantial effects we found with fusion with a cause, it is imperative that future studies allow participants to self-identify which cause they support or create multiple causes for each political orientation that are pro and anti. This would allow us to identify if the interaction we see between fusion with a cause and political orientation is due to the *anti* and *pro* nature of the respective causes or political orientation. An additional limitation to this study is its narrow frame of violent protests on college campuses surrounding free speech. While the framing allows for focus, it also means that the results may not be applicable to other pertinent situations that involve violent protests. If future studies wish to find more generalizable results, then we suggest utilizing a broader, more applicable issue. If future studies wish to understand more about the issues we chose to explore in this study, then we suggest that they narrow the age range of their participants to college aged (18 to 24 years old) individuals. Due to a limited subject pool, we chose to allow subjects of any age to participate in the study; however, for more accurate results that reflect the reality of the issues on college campuses, it would be best for future research to narrow the participant age range.

This study sought to understand what factors may compel individuals to endorse and participate in violent protests. We anticipated that the pervasive use of social media may influence individual participation in violent protests through the perception of an in-group consensus supporting violent protests. Furthermore, we expected that individuals who were

strongly fused to their group and or cause may be more inclined to endorse and participate in violent protests to further the aims of their larger collective. Political orientation was included as an exploratory variable; however, we did not anticipate a significant main effect of political orientation. While political orientation acting as the driving force behind the interactions, we see is unexpected, it also brings up significant questions about what may influence participation in violent protests. Violent protests surrounding free speech on college campuses, such as the ones that arose in response to Milo Yiannopoulos, are primarily planned and conducted by students that identify as Democrats. Similarly, in our study, Democrats reported a significantly greater overall support for and willingness to engage in violent protests than Republicans. Given that the results mimic the reality of the circumstances in which we chose to frame this study, then it is likely that the situational characteristics are perceived as more threatening and thus more deserving of costly, violent behaviors for Democrats than Republicans. Further research is necessary to genuinely understand what drives individuals and groups to engage in violent protests.

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### Appendix A





#### No Consensus - Republican


 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

Psalm 11:5: "The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion."  
[#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes





 3  20  30 

 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

I don't get Christian social justice leaders aligning with the violent protest-industry anti-free-speech crowd. Tis not what Jesus would do.

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

 3  20  30 


 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

Guys, leave the rioting and the violence to the dems. Go out and exercise your right to vote and peacefully protest.

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes





 3  20  30 

 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

Our founding fathers didn't create this nation so that it will be dismantled by communists! They'll have to kill me before I stop fighting for this country.  
[#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

 3  20  30 

 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

You have got to be kidding me? A Conservative can't even talk on a college campus without risk of bodily harm, free speech shut down. We might as well give them the violent revolution they are requesting. [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

 3  20  30 

 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

Those liberals want to take our right to free speech away? They will have to fight us to take it!

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

 3  20  30 

 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

And the [#lunacy](#) of the [#farleft](#) continues. On the path to [#destroy](#) [#FreeSpeech](#). They won't get far. We have the means and the will to stop them  
[#2ndamendment](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes




 3  20  30 

 [\[Redacted\]](#) Follow

Violent protests only undermine the fight for freedom of speech. There are better ways to combat the threat to our 1st amendment rights.

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

 3  20  30 

**Appendix B**  
No Consensus - Democrat

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

Violent protests only undermine the fight for equality. There are better ways to combat bigotry than rioting

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

Guys, leave the rioting and the violence to the GOP. Support peaceful protests!

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

Obama: "Violent protests undermine rather than advance justice."  
[#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30


 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

I oppose these speakers more than anyone, but violent protests are no way to bring about change in our communities. We are a representative democracy. VOTE!

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

"The opposite of remembering isn't forgetting, it is justice." The people have not forgotten, and the people want justice. What you call "violent protests," I call RECKONING.

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

I will do anything to defend my fellow students from hatred. That includes fighting fist to fist with the "make america great again" nazis! [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

True change requires sacrifice. Equality will not be won without a fight. Don't be afraid to stand with us against white supremacy [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [\[Name\]](#) Follow

This is exactly what happens when you have an election where the voice of the people didn't count... [#ViolentProtests](#) [#Trump](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

### Appendix C Pro-Violent Consensus - Conservative

 [Follow](#)

Those liberals want to take our right to free speech away? They will have to fight us to take it!

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [Follow](#)

There is no such thing as a peaceful protest with Antifa involved. As long as they are there, violence will be inevitable. We respond to their instigation. [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30


 [Follow](#)

And the [#lunacy](#) of the [#farleft](#) continues. On the path to [#destroy #FreeSpeech](#). They won't get far. We have the means and the will to stop them [#2ndamendment](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [Follow](#)

What is to be done if and when all else fails? Turn the other cheek? If you want justice, you must first prepare for war. The dems doesn't play by the rules. While I don't condone violence, sometimes it's a necessary evil.

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [Follow](#)

Our founding fathers didn't create this nation so that it will be dismantled by communists! They'll have to kill me before I stop fighting for this country. [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [Follow](#)

Far-left threats and violence is getting way out of hand. Fight fire with fire. [#TeaParty #DerangedDems #Antifa](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [Follow](#)

You have got to be kidding me? A Conservative can't even talk on a college campus without risk of bodily harm, free speech shut down. We might as well give them the violent revolution they are requesting. [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

 [Follow](#)

Protesting a conservative speaker is 100% hate speech. The dems believe we should fight hate, so lets fight them! [#violentprotests](#)

12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019

20 Retweets 30 Likes

3 20 30

### Appendix D

#### Pro-Violent Consensus- Liberal

The image displays eight individual tweets arranged in a 4x2 grid. Each tweet is from a verified user (indicated by a blue checkmark) and is dated 12:00 PM - 14 Sep 2019. Each tweet has 20 retweets and 30 likes. The tweets contain the following text:

- Tweet 1 (Top Left):** "My mantra: if one is oppressed, all are oppressed. We must fight the forces that hold us down. Whatever it takes. #protests #violentprotests"
- Tweet 2 (Top Right):** "True change requires sacrifice. Equality will not be won without a fight. Don't be afraid to stand with us against white supremacy #violentprotests"
- Tweet 3 (Second Row, Left):** "What is to be done if and when all else fails? Turn the other cheek? If you want peace and justice, you must first prepare for war. The GOP doesn't play by the rules. While I don't condone violence, sometimes it's a necessary evil."
- Tweet 4 (Second Row, Right):** "If you really want protests to stop, give us justice and protect us from hate. Please. Why are protests turning violent? Because it is the only way we will be heard."
- Tweet 5 (Third Row, Left):** "Thing is, there is no such thing as a peaceful protest with Trumpists involved. They come angry and ready for violence. We respond to their instigation."
- Tweet 6 (Third Row, Right):** "\"The opposite of remembering isn't forgetting, it is justice.\" The people have not forgotten, and the people want justice. What you call \"violent protests,\" I call RECKONING."
- Tweet 7 (Bottom Row, Left):** "This is exactly what happens when you have an election where the voice of the people didn't count... #ViolentProtests #Trump"
- Tweet 8 (Bottom Row, Right):** "I will do anything to defend my fellow students from hatred. That includes fighting fist to fist with the \"make america great again\" nazis! #violentprotests"

## **Appendix E**

### The Verbal Scale of Identity Fusion (Gomez et al., 2011)

#### Fusion with the Group - Political Party

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(from 0 = totally disagree, to 7 = totally agree)

- 1.- My political party is me.
- 2.- I am one with my political party.
- 3.- I feel immersed in my political party.
- 4.- I have a deep emotional bond with my political party.
- 5.- I am strong because of my political party.
- 6.- I'll do for my political party more than any other group members would do
- 7.- I make my political party strong.

## **Appendix F**

The Verbal Scale of Identity Fusion (Gomez et al., 2011)

Fusion with the Cause - Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(from 0 = totally disagree, to 7 = totally agree)

- 1.- My Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause is me.
- 2.- I am one with the Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause.
- 3.- I feel immersed in the Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause.
- 4.- I have a deep emotional bond with the Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause.
- 5.- I am strong because of the Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause.
- 6.- I'll do for the Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause more than any other cause supporters would do
- 7.- I make the Anti-Hate Speech/ Pro-Free Speech Cause strong.

## Appendix G

### Self-Report of Violent Protest Intentions and Support

#### Support

*To what extent do you agree with the following statements?*

(from 1 = totally disagree, to 7 = totally agree)

1. - Violent protests are an appropriate means for protecting my values.
2. - Violent protests are an effective tool for protecting my group's interests.
3. - Violent protests are an effective tool for achieving my group's goals.
4. - I would support my fellow group members if they were to protest violently.

#### Intentions

*Imagine a scenario in which a conservative speaker has been invited to your college campus. This speaker promotes ideas that you strongly oppose (Support). and stands for things that you find to be wrong. There is a planned protest*

*Please respond how likely you would be to take the following actions in response to this speaker's arrival on your campus.*

(from 1 = Very unlikely, to 7 = Very likely)

1. - If a protest I was a part of turned violent, I would fight alongside my peers.
2. - I would personally help plan a violent protest.
3. - I would be willing to attack any counter-protestors who threatened my group.
4. - I would damage property if it helped my group.