Proposal to Include Moral Foundations Questions on the American National Elections Survey (ANES) 2008 Questionnaire
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Introduction

A large body of recent research demonstrates that individuals' moral worldviews—the categorical modes they use to make decisions about right and wrong— Influence many of the choices they make and the outcomes they experience. An obvious, if understudied, arena for considering the outcomes of these moral worldviews is in citizens' political choices. We therefore propose the addition of the 31-item version of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2007) and a single-question measure of moral cultures (Hunter 2000; Vaisey 2007) to the ANES 2008 battery. These would allow for theoretically important linkages between morality and political thought and behavior. In addition, including both the one-question and the MFQ versions would allow for estimating the validity of the shorter version on a nationally representative sample. However, if resources do not allow both versions, there is sufficient existing research to make the one-item question useful alone.

Proposed Questions

1.) Moral Foundations Questionnaire

We propose including the well-described and generally-available measure, the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (31 item version), by Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian Nosek (available at http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/MFQ31.doc and reproduced in a slightly adapted version below). The individual items in the scale are used to compute scales for estimating the respondent’s reliance on five moral foundations: Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, Ingroup/Loyalty,
Authority/Respect, and Purity/Sanctity. (This is discussed in more depth below.)

**Part 1.**

When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent is each of the following things relevant to your thinking? Please answer with a number from 0-5 for each statement, where 0 is not at all relevant; 2 is slightly relevant, 3 is somewhat relevant, 4 is very relevant, and 5 is extremely relevant; this is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong.

_____ Whether or not someone was harmed
_____ Whether or not someone believed in astrology
_____ Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
_____ Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
_____ Whether or not someone failed to fulfill the duties of his or her role
_____ Whether or not someone did something disgusting
_____ Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
_____ Whether or not someone acted unfairly
_____ Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
_____ Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
_____ Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
_____ Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
_____ Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
_____ Whether or not the action affected your group
Part 2.

I'm going to read you several sentences. For each one, please tell me how much you agree or disagree. A 0 means you strongly disagree, a 1 that you moderately disagree, a 2 that you slightly disagree, a 3 that you slightly agree, a 4 that you moderately agree, and a 5 that you strongly agree.

One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.

If we are to fight crime effectively, some people’s rights will have to be violated.

It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.

Men and women each have different roles to play in society.

People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.

It can never be right to kill a human being.

Justice, fairness and equality are the most important requirements for a society.

I am proud of my country’s history.

If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer’s orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.

I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.

Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.

People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.

Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.

Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.
2.) Single-Item Measure of Moral Worldview

We also propose adding this single-item measure of moral worldview, which is based on James
Davidson Hunter’s (2000) operationalization of the moral typology outlined in Robert Bellah and
colleagues’ Habits of the Heart (Bellah et al. 1985). Slightly different variations of this question have
been used in the Survey on the Beliefs and Moral Values of America’s Children (1989), the American
Religion and Political and Civic Involvement after 9/11 Survey (2002), and each wave of the National

If you were unsure of what was right or wrong in a particular situation, how would you decide
what to do?
  – Do what would make you happy
  – Do what would improve your situation or get you ahead
  – Follow the advice of an authority in your community
  – Do what the other members of your community think is best
  – Do what God or Scripture tells you is right

Extended Justification

Political sociologists and political scientists have become increasingly interested in the
relationship among culture, morality, cognition, and political behavior. In sociology, a tradition going
back at least to Habits of the Heart (1985) questions the role that qualitatively different forms of moral
culture play in shaping political and civic behaviors. Habits identified four main types of moral culture:
expressive individualist, utilitarian individualist, civic republican, and biblical. The authors worried
that an increase in the predominance of individualist “moral languages” and the decline of the civic and
biblical languages would lead to a decline in civic engagement.¹ Though this hypothesis generated a
great deal of research (see e.g., Lichterman 1996), it was never formally tested. Recent research by
Beyerlein and Vaisey (2006), however, shows that those who emphasize civic responsibility over
personal fulfillment as reasons for helping the needy are, in fact, more likely to volunteer for
community projects, even when taking altruistic attitudes into account.

The moral typology outlined in Habits has also inspired other work. J.D. Hunter’s (2000)
research on adolescent moral cultures in the U.S. used a youth-specific version of the question
proposed above to look at differences in moral decision-making. Hunter found enormous differences in
attitudes about cheating, stealing, sexual behavior, drug and alcohol use, and a number of other
outcomes. More recently, the National Study of Youth and Religion has asked teenagers a similar
question and research has found that their answers are among the strongest predictors of personal and
civic behaviors nearly three years later (Vaisey 2007). In addition to these findings about behavior,
Vaisey (2007) also found that these moral worldviews are able to predict changes in social network
composition, with young adults who chose individualist responses in 2002 having lower than predicted
numbers of volunteering friends in 2005. To this point, then, there is a growing body of sociological
research—using a variety of populations and outcomes—that suggests the importance of moral-cultural
worldview for shaping behavior and the evolution of social networks.

Understanding the political effects of moral worldviews is important, as well, for evaluating the
deliberative potential of everyday citizens. Perrin (2005, 2006) demonstrates that the “political
microcultures” within which people deliberate have strong, independent effects on the ways they argue
(see also Eliasoph and Lichterman 2002). This effect persists net of the issue being discussed and the
organizational involvements of the speakers. Similarly, Perrin and Vaisey (2008) show that authors of
letters to the editor engage in different forms of argument based on the audience they hope to reach.

¹ Robert Putnam (2000) made a similar claim about the role that cultural shifts might play in declines in social capital, when
he suggested that cohort replacement has led to changes in the “social habits and values” (p. 275) related to civic
engagement.
Both of these dynamics are likely, in part, the result of aggregations and perceptions of moral worldviews.

Research in psychology and cognitive science has also begun to reconsider the role that qualitative differences in morality play in political behavior. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt and his collaborators (see review in Haidt 2007) have been investigating empirically the relationship between political liberalism and conservatism and differences in “moral intuition.” Building on anthropologist Richard Shweder’s (1997) work on what he has called the “big three” moral orders—autonomy, community, and divinity—Haidt has identified five moral foundations that are thought to underlie most political divisions. These five foundations are Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority/Respect, and Purity/Sanctity. Haidt and his collaborators argue that much of the “culture war” can be attributed to the fact that liberals and conservatives privilege these foundations differently, and at an intuitive (rather than fully conscious) level (Haidt and Graham 2007). These assertions are supported by a wide variety of laboratory experiments (see Haidt 2007), and the MFQ is the most psychometrically up-to-date instrument for measuring these moral foundations.

With this background in mind, our proposal seeks to combine the sampling and behavioral strengths of research in sociology and political science with the quality of measurement characteristic of psychology. Including both the MFQ-31 and the single-item moral worldviews question would allow researchers to do a number of things, including: 1) to elaborate more rigorously the moral basis of voting decisions; 2) to explore how different moral foundations can support similar policy positions; 3) to explore how differences in moral foundations give rise to political disagreements; and 4) to investigate more thoroughly the psychological underpinnings of the moral cultures identified in sociological research.

**Keywords**

morality; culture; cognition; worldview; foundations

**References**


