

Research Statement – Grant Armstrong

My research primarily focuses on three broad areas within American politics: political psychology, public opinion, and political behavior. More specifically, my past and current research examined political consumerism, political polarization, voting and elections, social identity theory, the relationship between moral values and political views, and public opinion on foreign policy. Additionally, my dissertation includes a focus on the negative effects of political polarization.

My dissertation focuses on political consumerism. I attempt to gain a better understanding of public opinion on political boycotts, in addition to the psychology behind such actions, and the characteristics of those who engage in this behavior. One of the aspects of political consumerism I examine is the characteristics of those who choose to forego or to select a product based on the political preferences of a CEO's or a company's practices, as well as how these behaviors contribute to or are driven by political polarization. Further, I use a behavioral test to determine if citizens are willing to pay more for products from a company only because of perceived shared political values. Since political boycotts and political polarization seem correlated, I also pursue more normative effects (e.g., a possible increase in out-group animus and in-group affect). This subject appears to broadly encompass my major research foci, and anatomizes a topic more generally examined in the European context.

In addition to my dissertation, while at the University of Mississippi I have had the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and fellow graduate students as co-authors. My recent article, "Framing Hate: Moral Foundations, Party Cues, and (In)Tolerance of Offensive Speech," co-authored with Dr. Julie Wronski, was recently published in the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* and examines mechanisms that potentially reduce tolerance for hate speech through party cues and moral values. The article examines how support for or opposition to hate speech can be manipulated based on party cues, moral values, and message framing. We found that party cues in certain instances can reduce tolerance for hate speech, as can moral frames, but coupled together there is not an additive effect.

In other work (with Dr. Conor Dowling and Travis Endicott) that is currently under review, we examine political and racial identity and the reactions of citizens when they are attacked on either of those bases. Based on two survey experiments it appears that racial and political attacks elicit similar responses. When either identity is attacked, citizens have similar negative reactions to the political candidate who engaged in the invective. This is demonstrated through both lower impressions of and less willingness to vote for that candidate. The results were consistent among race and party, which suggests that white identity has grown increasingly important in our current age of social polarization.

In another paper with Dowling and Endicott, we explore public opinion in response to election interference by a foreign regime. The data here, obtained as part of the 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, suggest that Americans are reluctant to aggressively retaliate when a foreign nation interferes in American elections. This result holds irrespective of the offender's

regime type (democracy or non-democracy) or the proximity of the interference—citizens’ responses are similar whether voting machines are hacked in their own state or in another state. Election interference emerged as a hot button topic in the United States following the 2016 elections. Now, the media, political elites, and others are aware of the potential for election intervention. Yet it is surprising that our results indicate little support for aggressive retaliation (i.e. military action) against a nation that interferes in the democratic processes in the United States. If this is the case, nations have little risk and high reward for undermining the legitimacy of U.S. elections.

These projects have been supported by different groups at my university. I have received funds from the Department of Political Science at the University of Mississippi to field surveys. The College of Liberal Arts has supplied me with two summer grants to pursue the previously stated research opportunities. Most recently, I was awarded a competitive grant from the Graduate Student Research Council for the first survey for my dissertation. I believe this is a testament to the relevance and novelty of my research agenda.

My future research plans seek to advance and expand past projects and pursue new avenues. For example, I would like to extend my article on hate speech to include different targets. Also, I would like to update the paper I presented at the 2018 American Political Science Association Annual Meeting (“Target-Sensitive Framing: Broadening the Persuasive Appeal of Issue Frames”) to include not merely a countervailing moral message, but also a video of the messenger. While extant research demonstrates reframed moral appeals can modify existing opinions, little has been done to connect this literature to that which examines the important role of the messenger. And, due to social polarization, the appearance (e.g., black v. white, male v. female, etc.) of the messenger might be equally important or more important in the formation of opinions than the message itself.

In sum, my research covers many areas within the purview of American political behavior. I hope to continue to develop and refine my robust research agenda at your institution, and I look forward to collaborating with both faculty and students.