

# The Virtuous Side of the Escalator: Political Orientation and the Moralization of Public Social Norms

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## BACKGROUND

Public social norms are implicitly agreed upon rules to maximize coordination in shared spaces. When these norms are violated, witnesses may sanction the deviant. While all types of people may recognize that a violation is wrong, we hypothesize that political ideology effects how much moral conviction an individual applies to that violation.

## METHODS

305 participants (181 male, 123 female, 1 other) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Three subsets of 11 social norm violations were shown to three groups of participants from a total of 33 (adapted from Brauer & Chaurand, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. Self identified political orientation of participants was 140 liberals, 99 conservatives, and 66 moderates.

## MEASURES

**Moralization:** Moral conviction is described as the absolute belief that something is right or wrong, moral or immoral<sup>2</sup>. We operationalize moralization as the degree to which someone holds a moral conviction towards a norm violation. These questions are adapted from Skitka & Morgan (2014)<sup>3</sup> and Skitka et al., (2015)<sup>4</sup>

- **Wrongness:** “It was wrong for the person to do this.”
- **Law:** “There should be a law enforced against this.”
- **Firmness:** “Imagine someone disagreed with your position on whether it is wrong to do this. To what extent would you conclude the other person is surely mistaken?”
- **Cultural Universality:** “However wrong it is to do this, it would be just as wrong in another culture.”

<b>Wrongness, Law, Culture</b>	○ —●—○ —●—○ —●—○ —●—○ —●—○ Disagree Somewhat Neutral Somewhat Agree Disagree
<b>Firmness</b>	○ —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ Not at all A Little Somewhat Mostly Very Much
<b>Political Orientation</b>	● —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ —○—○ Very Liberal Liberal Somewhat Moderate Somewhat Conservative Very Conservative Liberal Liberal Conservative Conservative

Table 1. The measures used and their accompanying scale.

## ANALYSIS

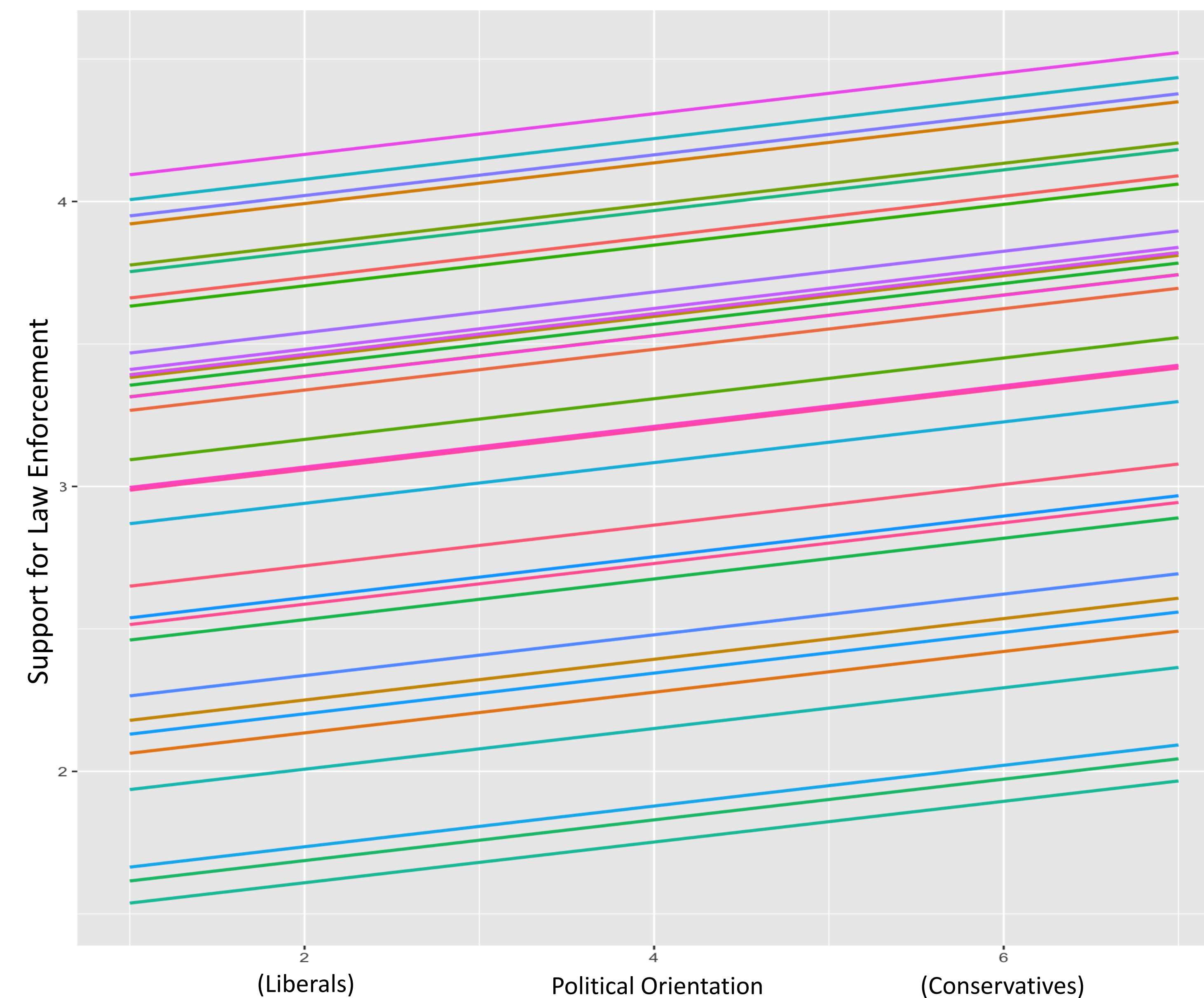


Fig 1. Relationship between desire for law enforcement (y-axis) and political ideology (x-axis) for 33 norm violations. The figure shows predicted values from a mixed model with random intercepts for participant and norm.

## RESULTS:

### 1. Hardly any disagreement on wrongness

Political ideology did not correlate with the participant’s perceived wrongness of the violation. Participants on average, “somewhat agree” that it was wrong for the person to do this.

This supports the idea that the violations participants saw were of social norms (due to the consensus), rather than only actions that occur in public/shared spaces.

### 2. Conservatives wanted law enforcement

Political ideology did correlate with the participant’s belief that there should be a law enforced against the social norm violation,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $Z = 2.85$ ,  $p = .004$ . As public social norms are implicitly rather than explicitly (written rules) instructed/agreed upon, conservatives may take the violation of these innate norms more harshly than constructed norms.

## RESULTS (cont.):

### 3. Conservatives were firmer in judgement

Political ideology did correlate with the participant’s belief that if someone disagreed with their position they would surely be mistaken,  $\beta = .06$ ,  $Z = 2.22$ ,  $p = .03$ . This suggests that conservatives may be more sure about their moral judgements of innate norms or social norm violations than liberals.

### 4. Almost everyone believed that there was no cultural universality

Political ideology did not correlate with the participant’s belief that the social norm violation would be equally wrong in another culture,  $\beta = .02$ ,  $Z = .94$ ,  $p = .35$ . It is possible that they believe it *should* be a violation in other cultures, but may not actually be.

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

- We found evidence that suggests conservatives are more firm and punitive of behavior that the majority also agrees upon as wrong.
- A limitation is that participants were shown a subset, rather than the entire list of our norms.
- Future studies will investigate if conservatives attribute social norm violations to character, opposed to external factors more than liberals, as justification for punishment.
- We may also examine moral conviction towards violations of implicit/explicitly agreed upon norms, and perceived innate norm value.

## REFERENCES

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