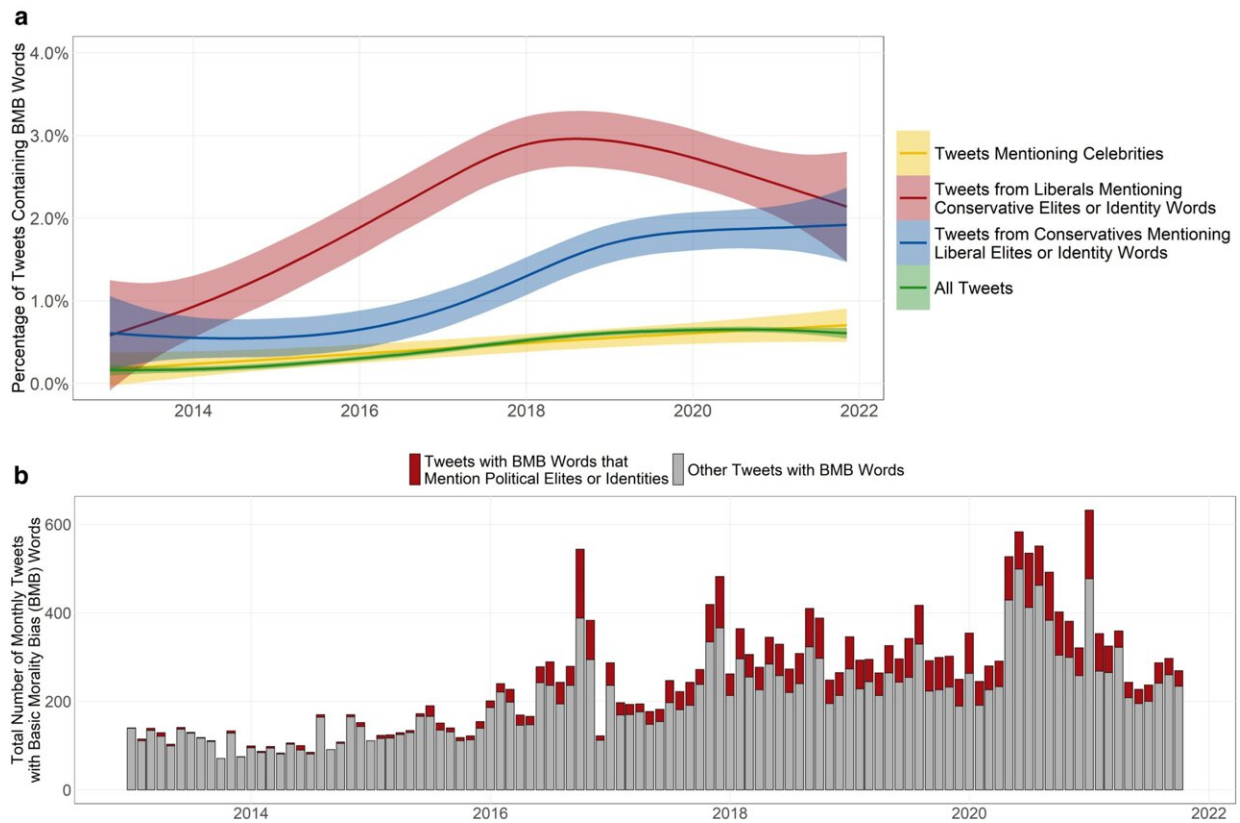


Partisan politics fuel altered perceptions of immorality, study finds

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Increases in basic morality words within political tweets. Trend lines in Figure 1a were drawn using GAM smoothing with 95% CIs. Data presented in Figure 1a and b are aggregated by week and month, respectively. Credit: *PNAS Nexus* (2024). DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae244

Democrats and Republicans overestimate the percentage of people in the

opposing party who approve of widely agreed-upon moral wrongs, such as theft or animal abuse, according to a study. Today, Americans hate their opposing political party more than they love their own party, and political animosity and dehumanization of opposing party members have been on the rise for decades.

Curtis Puryear and colleagues looked for a "basic morality bias" in [social media posts](#) from 5,806 political partisans by searching for words that referenced blatantly immoral acts or traits. Words like "pedophile" and "homicidal" are used increasingly often in political conversations on Twitter (now known as X), especially after 2016.

An [online survey](#) of 240 Democrats and 106 Republicans found that people overestimated opponents' approval of unambiguously immoral behavior, such as cheating on one's spouse—and the trend persisted in a follow-up study which financially incentivized participants to answer accurately.

In a separate study of 202 students and [community members](#) from the southeastern United States, learning that a political opponent condemns basic moral wrongs made participants less likely to dehumanize that opponent and slightly more likely to be interested in getting involved with a cross-partisan organization.

Additional studies indicate that corrections to the basic morality bias make people more willing to work with political opponents and less likely to dehumanize the opposing party in general. According to the authors, correcting the basic morality bias is an effective approach to combat political dehumanization.

The study is [published](#) in the journal *PNAS Nexus*.

More information: Puryear, C. et al. People believe political

opponents accept blatant moral wrongs, fueling partisan divides, *PNAS Nexus* (2024). DOI: [10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae244](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae244).
[academic.oup.com/pnasnexus/art ... /3/7/pgae244/7712370](https://academic.oup.com/pnasnexus/article/3/7/pgae244/7712370)

Provided by PNAS Nexus

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