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RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The Fusion of Brand and Ballots: Postmodern Populism and Political Identity

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Abstract

Since the 2016 election, receptiveness to and support for populist candidates in the United States has risen. While the frameworks of Social Identity Theory and Identity Fusion Theory have traditionally been used to explain shifts in political identity, they fall short of addressing the recent rise in receptiveness to and support for populist candidates and platforms, namely because they don't account for the consumer-driven and media-focused dynamics that influence voter loyalty in postmodern democracies, especially post-COVID. This research introduces a new framework gaining momentum in political science research: brand identity fusion, a theory used in marketing that early research suggests has the potential to serve as a more effective framework for understanding the receptiveness and deeply loyal support seen for populist leaders in America.

This research will conduct a correlation study, combining and analyzing relationships between data from three surveys to assess the effectiveness of the three frameworks in explaining the recent shifts in voter behavior. By analyzing the strength of supporters' long-term loyalty to populist leaders and their receptiveness to their platforms and rhetoric, the research will evaluate whether brand identity fusion's emphasis on both group and personal alignment with a candidate's brand offers a stronger explanation than the conventional frameworks of social identity theory and identity fusion. The goal is to better understand political behavior in postmodern consumer-driven, media-centric democracies.

Introduction

Since 2016, increasing receptiveness to and support for populist candidates in the U.S. has raised questions about the long-term effects a shift toward populist politics could have on democratic norms and future political and voter behavior, both domestically and abroad. This shift suggests the need to reconsider conventional theories used to predict and track such behavior, namely social identity theory and identity fusion, which may no longer fully account for the complexities of political behavior in today's consumer-driven, media-saturated world, which has evolved since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social identity theory suggests that individuals categorize themselves into various social groups, and their identification with the group shapes their behaviors and perceptions. Identity fusion, a related concept, occurs when personal identity becomes emotionally connected with a group's identity, leading to strong in-group loyalty. These frameworks have been important in explaining and predicting political behavior in the past. However, both theories suggest that as political leaders fall out of favor or lose their power, supporters shift their focus to a new target of their support. Recent trends in American politics suggest that these traditional frameworks may not account for recent trends in voter behavior. The intensely loyal and sustained support demonstrated by Trump supporters, who often exhibit a deeply personal connection to him, and their unwavering receptiveness to and defense of his populist rhetoric and platform suggest that a piece of the political identity puzzle is missing.

Budding political science research into this missing piece of the puzzle has focused on brand identity fusion, a concept traditionally associated with marketing. Brand identity fusion says that political loyalty is driven by strong group identity and a deeply personal emotional connection to a candidate, not just as an individual but as a representation of ideas and imagery voters aspire to

emulate, which marketers would define as a brand image. Preliminary research into its application in identity politics suggests that candidates who can effectively mold a brand image that aligns with voters' identity and values in some way can foster a strong, nearly unbreakable sense of loyalty and unwavering support.

Because brand identity fusion is a relatively new concept in political science, there is a notable lack of empirical data to establish whether it offers a more accurate framework for explaining the rise of populist support compared to traditional theories. This research proposal aims to compare the correlational strength of social identity theory, identity fusion, and brand identity fusion in explaining the receptiveness to and support for populist candidates in the United States. This comparison will help determine if key metrics of brand identity fusion have a stronger correlation with these behaviors and whether this translates to it being a more suitable framework for measuring voter behavior in today's consumer-based, media-centric culture. As such, the key research question driving this research is: to what extent does brand identity fusion explain the rise in receptiveness to and support for populist candidates in the United States? This research will inform policymakers, political strategists, and researchers and add to the study of identity politics by examining how branding, group identity, and emotional attachment interact to shape the rise of populism, both in American and other democracies around the world.

Literature Review

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a mainstream framework in identity politics used to understand voter behavior and political loyalty. Huddy[1] explains this theory as the process by which individuals form self-concepts via group affiliations, shaping their beliefs and loyalties.

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[1] Leonie Huddy, *From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory* (Political Psychology, 2001), 127.

Marchlewska[2] adds that people gravitate toward groups with shared beliefs and norms, creating strong in-group identity[3]. When members deviate from group norms, it threatens cohesion and establishes out-groups[4].

Populist leaders often wield the power of rhetoric to exploit this dynamic. They create an 'us versus them' mentality that consolidates in-group identity. Populist rhetoric incites fear in supporters by alleging external threats against members of the in-group, such as when Trump portrays the Justice Department's actions against him as attacks on his followers. Uysal[5] calls this an

Figure 1. Peffley, et. al., *Left-Right Social Identity and the Polarization of Political Tolerance,* (Political Research Quarterly, 2023), 9, fig. 2.

accentuated dichotomy of 'good' in-groups versus 'bad' out-groups, where fear-based narratives deepen loyalty through collective identity reinforcement[6]. Over time, populist rhetoric validates this identity reinforcement by continuing to acknowledge their fears and offer an end to them, enhancing perceptions of his integrity[7].

Ferrari (Figure 1) discovered that this identity reinforcement influences support for populist messages. Democrats were 88% likely to endorse a message associated with Biden, but only
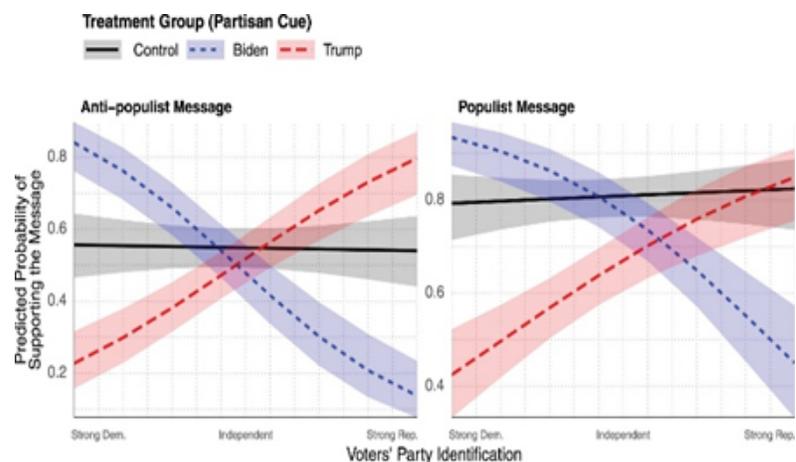
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[2] Marta Marchlewska,. *Populism as Identity Politics: Perceived In-Group Disadvantage, Collective Narcissism, and Support for Populism.* (Social Psychological and Personality Science 2018), pg. 152.

[3] Uysal, *An Integrative Social Identity Model of Populist Leadership.* (Social and Personality Psychology 2022), 5.

[4] Davies, *Donald Trump and the Rationalization of Transgressive Behavior: The Role of Group Prototypicality and Identity Advancement, (*Journal of Applied Social Psychology 2022) 482; Marchlewska, *Populism as Identity Politics,* 153.

[5] Uysal, *An Integrative Social Identity Model,* 2.

[6] Schultz, *We Are the People and You Are Fake News: A Social Identity Approach to Populist Citizens' False Consensus and Hostile Media Perceptions,* (Communication Research 2020), 208; Davies, *Donald Trump and the Rationalization of Transgressive Behavior: The Role of Group Prototypicality and Identity Advancement,* 482.

[7] Davies "*Donald Trump and the Rationalization of Transgressive Behavior,* 490; Uysal, *An Integrative Social Identity Model of Populist Leadership,* 4.

40% when linked to Trump. Republicans showed a similar pattern, reflecting polarized support for populist or anti-populist messages based on the party and person they more closely identified with[8]. Uysal[9] and Huddy[10] confirm this polarization as a key metric in social identity theory. Schultz[11] cautions that this dynamic, driven by populist narratives, fosters exclusionary practices and deepens polarization[12].

Peffley et al. observed (Figure 2) that increased left-right identity strength correlates with greater polarization. In their study, strong leftist participants supported free speech and minority rights more than their right-leaning counterparts, which became increasingly more divergent the more strongly they identified with their respective parties[13]. Martel[14] connects this to Trump's campaign speeches, where he builds distrust in the government which causes emotionally charged polarization, leading each side to view the other side as irredeemable[15].
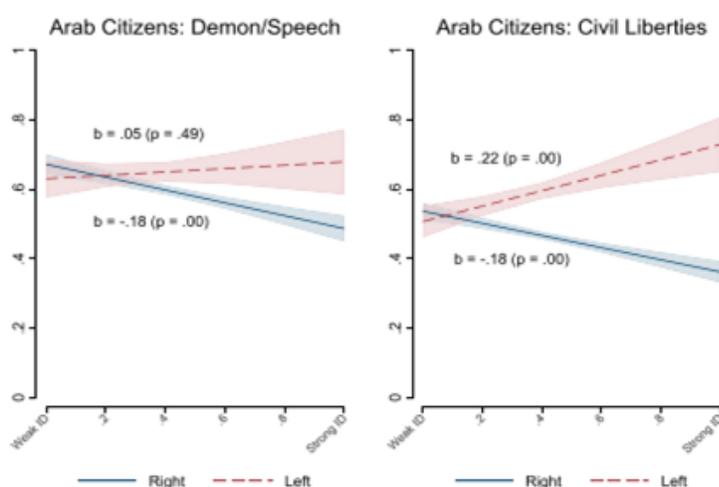

Figure 2. Peffley, et. al., *Left-Right Social Identity and the Polarization of Political Tolerance,* (Political Research Quarterly, 2023), 9, fig. 2.

SIT explains collective in-group support seen among supporters of populist candidates but struggles to account for the rise in receptiveness to populist leaders and platforms. While some back him for immigration policies or economic stances, others support him as an outsider. SIT

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[8] D.Ferrari*, The effect of party identification and party cues on populist attitudes.* (Research & Politics, 2022), 7.

[9] Uysal, *An Integrative Social Identity Model.*, 9.

[10] Huddy, *From Social to Political Identity,* 130.

[11] Schultz, *We Are the People and You Are Fake News,* 205.

[12] Schultz, *We Are the People and You Are Fake News,* 207; Davies,*Donald Trump and the Rationalization of Transgressive Behavio,* 482.

[13] Mark Peffley et al., *Left-Right Social Identity and the Polarization of Political Tolerance.* (Political Research 2023), 8-9.
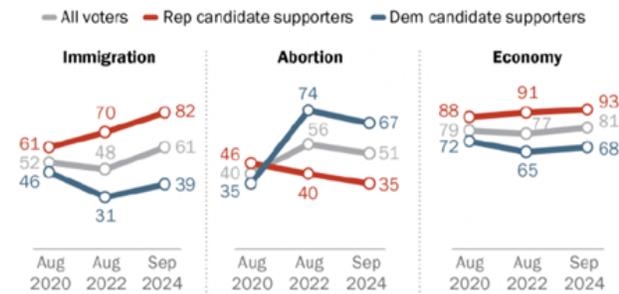
[14] F.A. Martel *Identity Fusion and Support for Political Authoritarianism: Lessons from the U.S. Insurrection of 2021.*(Political Psychology 2024), 2.

[15]Martel, *Identity Fusion and Support for Political Authoritarianism*, 2.

captures the connection supporters feel to populist ideals but not the initial reason for their receptiveness to them in the first place.

For Trump supporters, immigration was a more important issue in 2024 than in 2020

*% of registered voters who say each issue is **very important** to their vote in that year's election*

— All voters —•— Rep candidate supporters —•— Dem candidate supporters

Immigration / Abortion / Economy

Aug 2020 Aug 2022 Sep 2024 (repeated for each panel)

Note: Based on registered voters. In 2020 and 2024, candidate supporters are for the presidential election. In 2022, candidate supporters are for the congressional election. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 26–Sept. 2, 2024.

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Figure 2. Peffley, et. al., *Left-Right Social Identity and the Polarization of Political Tolerance*, (Political Research Quarterly, 2023), 9, fig. 2.

Identity Fusion, a newer framework, bridges this gap. Unlike SIT's focus on collective identity, identity fusion allows for the inclusion of personal identity with group identity. Swann[16] suggests fusion leads to increased receptiveness by merging personal beliefs with collective narratives[17]. For instance, Trump's 'Make America Great Again' slogan acts as a fusion target, aligning personal priorities like the economy or immigration with collective identity[18]. These fusion targets allow supporters to latch on to one idea they find most appealing, opening them up to being more receptive to other ideas he and their fellow in-group members put forward. Jami[19] found high identity fusion among populist supporters, especially those with authoritarian tendencies, who rationalize his actions and view out-groups as existential threats[20]. Trump's recent emphasis on immigration and reproductive rights being threats to American jobs and traditional family values since 2020 has driven ideological shifts among his base. Figure 3 shows how support for stricter immigration rose 21%, while backing for abortion rights fell 11%

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[16] William Swann, *When Group Membership Gets Personal: A Theory of Identity Fusion*. (Psychological Review 2012) 449.

[17] Swann, *When Group Membership Gets Personal*, 449; C.B Mason, *Radicalized Trump Supporters: Construing, Identity Fusion, and Hypothetical and Actual Extremism*, (Journal of Constructivist Psychology 2024), 2.

[18] Swann, *When Group Membership Gets Personal*, 451; Mason, *Radicalized Trump Supporters,* 1.

[19] Jami, *Not Exactly Twins: Authoritarians and Populists Differ in Their Attitudes toward Trust in Government, Elitism, Pluralism, Political Identification, and Identity Fusion,* (Scandinavian Journal of Psychology 2024), 7.

[20] Martel, *Identity Fusion and Support for Political Authoritarianism*, 3; Jami, *Not Exactly Twins,* 7.

after 2020, aligning with his rhetoric[21]. This demonstrates that supporters have fused their identity so closely with Trump's that they willingly and almost instinctually shift their perspectives to match his, regardless of past stances.

Despite its insights on why there is a rise in receptiveness to populist leaders, identity fusion does not adequately address the societal factors that make populist ideologies appealing emotionally and psychologically. It focuses on ideological values as catalysts for triggering openness and further receptiveness to other ideas. Emerging research into a new framework based on Brand Identity Fusion suggests it may address the individual gaps in conventional theories since it naturally accounts for both receptiveness to and sustained support for brands. Research into this marketing theory as an application in explaining voter behavior explores how candidates, like brands, build receptiveness (recognition) and sustained support (loyalty) through symbolic connections and emotional resonance[22]. Kaneva[23] coined "brandidates" to describe figures who embody a branded persona rather than a political platform. By aligning with supporters' grievances and aspirations, brandidates increase initial receptiveness to their ideas and sustained support for them through shared symbolic values[24].

Brand identity fusion also explains why followers see threats tocanidates thet support as personal attacks. Schneiker[25] observes that supporters prioritize the branded persona of 'making America great again' over any one particular candidate's individual actions. This approach highlights how symbolic appeals drive deep emotional loyalty[26]. Trump has vowed to bring prayer back into

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[21] Martel, *Identity Fusion and Support for Political Authoritarianism*, 2.

[22] Krishna, *Exploring the Dynamics between Brand Investment, Customer Investment, Brand Identification, and Brand Identity Fusion,* (Journal of Business Research, 2021), 268; Kaneva, *The Rise of Brandidates? A Cultural Perspective on Political Candidate Brands in Postmodern Consumer Democracies,* (Journal of Customer Behaviour, 2016), 304.

[23] Kaneva, *The Rise of Brandidates,* 300.

[24] Kaneva, T*he Rise of Brandidates*, 306.

[25] Schneiker, *Telling the Story of the Superhero and the Anti-Politician as President: Donald Trump's Branding on Twitter,* (Political Studies Review 2019), 221.

[26] Schneiker, *Telling the Story of the Superhero,* 213.

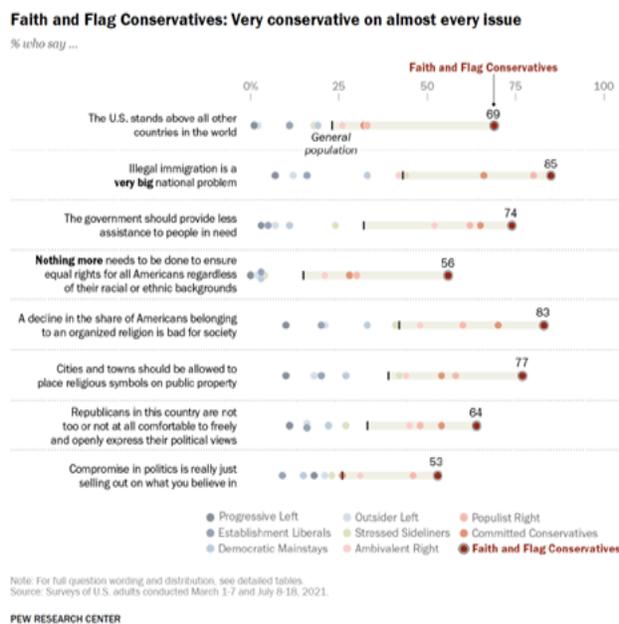Faith and Flag Conservatives: Very conservative on almost every issue

Figure 3. Peffley, et. al., *Left-Right Social Identity and the Polarization of Political Tolerance,* (Political Research Quarterly, 2023), 9, fig. 2.

school and allow for school choice[27]. He has said that illegal immigration hurts American workers, burdens American taxpayers, and undermines public safety.[28] He vows to shrink the social security safety net and push people toward self-sufficiency.[29] He has even claimed that "our country is missing a lot of religion…I think it was a much better place with religion."[30] These positions and views are issues that have deep support and resonance with the faith and flag conservatives, as shown in Figure 4, who are among his most avid supporters. This suggests, although not empirically proven, that a focused appeal by candidates to the brand of America their most loyal base wants leads that base to not supporting the person but the brand of America that they represents.

As a relatively new concept in political science, brand identity fusion lacks substantial empirical evaluation regarding its effectiveness in explaining voter receptiveness and loyalty toward populist candidates. This study aims to fill that gap by assessing whether brand identity fusion can be empirically proven to have a stronger correlation with the rise in receptiveness to and intensely loyal support for populist candidates compared to traditional frameworks like social identity theory and identity fusion. It will address three key questions: (1) What is the correlation

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[27] Wingfield, *Trump pledges to bring back prayer in schools and offer 'school choice' everywhere*, (Baptist News Global 2024).

[28] *Remarks by President Trump on the Illegal Immigration Crisis and Border Security – the White House,* (White House Archives 2018).

[29] Ludden, *The country's social safety net could be in danger as Trump looks to slash spending,* (NPR 2024).

[30] Brown, *Trump discusses inevitability of death, says he wants religious revival in US,* (The Christian Post 2024).

between receptiveness to populist candidates/rhetoric and sustained support? (2) How does this correlation compare to those explained by social identity theory and identity fusion? (3) Do findings suggest brand identity fusion is a more effective framework for analyzing voter preferences and behaviors in today's digitally interconnected, consumer-driven political landscape?

Methodology

This research will conduct a correlation study to identify and analyze the relationships between social identity theory, identity fusion, and brand identity fusion and the receptiveness to and sustained support of populist candidates and rhetoric in America. This will be accomplished by administering three surveys to study participants and evaluating the strength and direction of any existing corollary relationships. The research aims to determine whether the concept of brand identity fusion has a stronger and more positive correlation to the receptiveness and support of populist candidates than social identity theory and identity fusion.

Hypotheses

The primary hypothesis of this study is that brand identity fusion has a stronger and more positive correlation with the rise in receptiveness and deeply loyal support for populist candidates than identity fusion or social identity theory. Secondary to this, the study also hypothesized that brand identity fusion will have the strongest positive correlation with initial receptiveness to populist candidates compared to identity fusion and social identity theory, and identity fusion will demonstrate a strong correlation with deep loyalty. Still, brand identity fusion will be more effective in explaining long-term, unwavering support in media-driven political cultures.

Variables

The independent variables for this study are the three identity frameworks, with a specific emphasis on brand identity fusion. The dependent variables are receptiveness and support (as they relate to populist candidates and rhetoric). These dependent variables measure the outcomes the independent variable (brand identity fusion) is hypothesized to influence.

Operational Definitions

There are several operational definitions to clarify in this study. Receptiveness will be defined as an individual's willingness to accept and engage with populist rhetoric, ideologies, and leaders. This will be operationalized through surveys (see Appendix). Support will be defined as an active endorsement, backing, or advocacy for a particular leader or political movement, which can be exhibited through voting, attending rallies, or publicly defending a populist leader. Support will be operationalized through survey responses that indicate voting behavior in elections, political activity, and the extent to which an individual expresses approval of a particular leader. Populism will be defined as a political ideology that emphasizes an "us" (the people) versus "them" (the enemy) dichotomy. Populism will be operationalized through survey questions that identify and request feedback from participants on key rhetorical features of populist discourse from speeches, policies, and media presence, which will be used as indicators of populism. Brand will be defined as the distinct political identity and image created by a populist leader or movement based on a personal narrative or ideology that appeals to emotions, identity, and perceived grievances. Brand will be operationalized through survey responses that analyzing the consistency and strength of a leader's political messaging, media portrayals, and public persona among study participants.

Data Collection

Data will be collected using three surveys. The first survey will measure alignment with the three theoretical frameworks. Respondents will be asked to rate each statement on a scale of 1-5. Scores will be analyzed across the three frameworks to determine where respondents most strongly align (See Appendix 1.1). The second survey will measure alignment with populist and inclusive political Rhetoric. This survey is designed to assess how respondents align with populist or exclusionary rhetoric versus democratic or inclusive rhetoric, particularly in the context of political behavior. Participants will scroll through messages ranging from neutral statements to more moderate or extreme expressions of populist and inclusive rhetoric and select a social media emoji to represent their reaction to the post. Data will be analyzed by comparing scores to determine the respondents' alignment with populist or inclusive rhetoric (See Appendix 1.2). The third survey will measure the relationships between the three frameworks and receptiveness and support for populist candidates and rhetoric using a Likert scale. It will ask participants to respond to statements with a quantifier of strongly disagree to agree strongly. Data will be analyzed using Pearson's correlation to quantify relationships and scatter plots will be used to identify which of the three frameworks has the strongest and most positive correlation to receptiveness and support (See Appendix 1.3).

Sampling

This study will use random sampling, but it will stratify gender so that the population sample is representative of the current population of the United States. 51.1% are female and 48.9% are male. Because a larger sample size is required to detect weak correlations, this study wants to determine the strengths and or weaknesses of the three frameworks. This study will use the Pearson correlation; we will seek approximately 800 participants, 409 females and 391 males.

This will ensure a statistical power of 0.80, providing an 80% chance of detecting any relationship if it exists. It will also provide a significance level of 0.05, meaning there will only be a 5% chance of false positive results.

Conclusion

This proposal has identified gaps in conventional theoretical frameworks used in identity politics and presented a research plan to assess how brand identity fusion influences the growing receptiveness to and support for populist candidates in the United States. By comparing the explanatory power of brand identity fusion with the established frameworks of social identity theory and identity fusion, this research will provide much-needed empirical support for the effectiveness of brand identity fusion to explain the rising receptiveness to and support for populist candidates and rhetoric in the United States. The data collected from this research can then be used to inform political strategy and policy development, equipping policymakers, political strategists, and scholars with tools to better understand and engage with electorates in the modern era and develop effective campaigns to counter populist politics that run the risk of destabilizing democratic norms, both in the United States and in other democracies around the world.

About the Author

Max Kurzweil is a Muhlenberg College sophomore pursuing a double major in political science and business administration. With a strong interest in public service and the human resources industry, Max is particularly intrigued by the psychological and sociological factors driving unwavering support for populist candidates. Their current research explores these dynamics through frameworks such as social identity theory, brand identity theory, and identity fusion theory, employing a variety of methods to uncover deeper insights. Looking ahead, Max aims to continue researching postmodern populism and political identity, with a focus on understanding the motivations behind voter loyalty and support for political figures.

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Appendix

1.1 Survey for Measuring Alignment with Social Identity Theory, Identity Fusion Theory, and Brand Identity Fusion Theory

1.2 Survey for Measuring Alignment with Populist and Inclusive Political Rhetoric

1.3 Survey for Measuring Correlation to Receptiveness and Support

1.1 Survey for Measuring Alignment with Social Identity Theory, Identity Fusion Theory, and Brand Identity Fusion Theory

This survey is designed to evaluate alignment with Social Identity Theory (SIT), Identity Fusion Theory (IFT), and Brand Identity Fusion Theory (BIF) in the context of political behavior, such as the rise of populist candidates and movements. Respondents will be asked to rate each statement on a scale of 1-5, where:

> **1 = Strongly Disagree**
> **2 = Disagree**
> **3 = Neutral**
> **4 = Agree**
> **5 = Strongly Agree**

The questions will be uploaded onto a digital online survey platform and their order will be randomizd.

Interpreting Results

- **Social Identity Theory**: Respondents who score highly on questions about collective group identity (questions 1-10) show strong alignment with SIT.
- **Identity Fusion Theory**: Higher scores on questions about emotional and psychological connection to the group (questions 11-20) indicate a strong alignment with IFT, reflecting personal fusion with the group.
- **Brand Identity Fusion Theory**: Individuals who score highly on questions about personal connection to a political leader or movement (questions 21-30) demonstrate alignment with BIFT, focusing on leader-based fusion.

Analyzing the Data:

- Compare the scores across the three sections to determine where respondents most strongly align, whether with group identity (SIT), emotional fusion with the group (IFT), or personal identity fusion with a leader (BIFT).
- High scores in one section indicate the theory that most strongly aligns with the respondent's beliefs and behavior regarding political movements, populism, and the leader they support.

Social Identity Theory Questions

I consider the political group I support to be a fundamental part of who I am.

             1   2   3   4   5

When I think about political issues, I prioritize the interests of my political group over others.

             1   2   3   4   5

I feel a sense of belonging to the political group I support, even if I don't personally know most members.

             1   2   3   4   5

I strongly identify with the core values and beliefs of my political group.

             1   2   3   4   5

I often feel that my political group's success is directly tied to my own personal success.

             1   2   3   4   5

I actively engage in political activities because they reflect the values of my political group.

             1   2   3   4   5

I feel proud when my political group achieves success in political or social matters.

             1   2   3   4   5

I sometimes see political issues in terms of "us versus them" – my group versus the other groups.

             1   2   3   4   5

I am more likely to support policies that benefit my political group, even if they don't benefit me personally.

             1   2   3   4   5

I would feel a sense of loss if my political group were to lose influence or power.

             1   2   3   4   5

Identity Fusion Theory Questions

I feel that my personal identity is closely tied to the political group I support.

        1   2   3   4   5

The success or failure of my political group affects me personally on an emotional level.

        1   2   3   4   5

I feel a strong emotional connection to others who share my political views.

        1   2   3   4   5

If my political group faces difficulties, I feel personally threatened or upset.

        1   2   3   4   5

I would take extreme measures to support or defend my political group.

        1   2   3   4   5

I feel like the people in my political group are part of my extended family.

        1   2   3   4   5

I believe the identity of my political group is a direct reflection of who I am as a person.

        1   2   3   4   5

I would personally act or sacrifice for the sake of my political group's success, even if it meant personal cost.

        1   2   3   4   5

I feel a deep sense of responsibility to defend the interests of my political group.

        1   2   3   4   5

When I see my political group under attack, I feel like I am personally under attack.

        1   2   3   4   5

Brand Identity Fusion Theory Questions

I strongly identify with the political leader I support, as if they embody my values and beliefs.

     1   2   3   4   5

I see the political leader I support as an extension of myself and my identity.

     1   2   3   4   5

When the political leader I support succeeds, I feel personally proud, as if their success is my own.

     1   2   3   4   5

I trust the political leader I support to represent my personal ideals and values.

     1   2   3   4   5

I feel a personal bond with the political leader I support, beyond political or policy-related matters.

     1   2   3   4   5

I would follow the political leader I support into action even if it meant personal sacrifice.

     1   2   3   4   5

I feel emotionally attached to the political leader I support, like I would to a close friend/family member.

     1   2   3   4   5

I believe that the political leader I support's success is a reflection of my own values.

     1   2   3   4   5

I would defend the political leader I support from criticism, as if I were defending myself.

     1   2   3   4   5

I am more loyal to the political leader I support than to my political group as a whole.

     1   2   3   4   5

1.2 Survey for Measuring Alignment with Populist and Inclusive Political Rhetoric

This survey is designed to assess how respondents align with populist or exclusionary rhetoric versus democratic or inclusive rhetoric, particularly in the context of political behavior. The survey will present a scrolling series of social media posts from both left- and right-leaning leaders and their supporters. The posts range from neutral statements to more moderate or extreme expressions of populist and inclusive rhetoric. Partipciants will scroll through the messages and select one of the social media emojis to represent their reaction to the post.

	Love	=	2
	Like	=	1
	Dislike	=	-1
	Hate	=	-2

The posts will be presented in random order on a digital online survey platform.

Interpreting Results

- **Populist and Exclusionary Rhetoric:** Higher scores on posts that emphasize "us vs. them" narratives, division, or group loyalty reflect stronger alignment with populist ideologies. Respondents who agree more strongly with posts that advocate exclusionary or divisive language are considered to align with populist rhetoric.

- **Democratic and Inclusive Rhetoric:** Higher scores on posts that promote unity, cooperation, and collective well-being indicate stronger alignment with democratic and inclusive political discourse. Respondents who strongly agree with these types of posts are considered to favor inclusive rhetoric.

Analyzing the Data

- The data will be analyzed by categorizing responses based on the type of rhetoric people have the strongest emotional reactions to (populist/exclusionary vs. democratic/inclusive).

- A comparison of scores will help determine the respondents' alignment with either populist or inclusive rhetoric. Patterns will be identified by examining how participants from different political affiliations (e.g., left, right, centrist) respond to these different types of rhetoric.

LGBTQ Rights

Extreme Left: *"Dismantle heteronormativity in all public policies. Full liberation now!"*
Moderate Left: *"LGBTQ rights are human rights. No exceptions. #Pride"*
Moderate Right: *"We support everyone's rights but must also respect religious freedoms."*
Extreme Right: *"The LGBTQ agenda is a threat to traditional values. Protect our families!"*

Abortion

Extreme Left: *"Abortion bans are systemic violence against women and marginalized groups. Fight back!"*
Moderate Left: *"Access to abortion is critical healthcare. Protect Roe v. Wade."*
Moderate Right: *"We can support life while ensuring compassion for mothers in tough situations."*
Extreme Right: *"Every abortion is murder. End the industry of death now!"*

Gun Violence

Extreme Left: *"Ban all assault weapons now. The NRA is complicit in every tragedy!"*
Moderate Left: *"Universal background checks save lives. It's just common sense."*
Moderate Right: *"Support responsible gun ownership and focus on mental health solutions."*
Extreme Right: *"Any gun control is tyranny. Arm every law-abiding American to secure freedom!"*

Election Integrity

Extreme Left: *"The electoral college is a tool of white supremacy. Abolish it now!"*
Moderate Left: *"Expand voter access with mail-in ballots and same-day registration."*
Moderate Right: *"Strengthen ID requirements to ensure secure and trustworthy elections."*
Extreme Right: *"Elections are being stolen. Patriots must take action to protect democracy!"*

Traditional Family Values

Extreme Left: *"The 'traditional family' is a colonialist construct. Uplift chosen families!"*
Moderate Left: *"Support all family structures. Diversity makes us stronger. #LoveIsLove"*
Moderate Right: *"Traditional families are the backbone of our society. Let's honor them."*
Extreme Right: *"Attack on traditional families is an attack on America. We must fight back!"*

1.3 Survey for Measuring Correlation to Receptiveness and Support

The goal of this survey is to gather data on two major outcomes:

1. **Receptiveness to political messages** (how individuals react to political rhetoric and messages).
2. **Support for political leaders or movements** (how loyal individuals are to political leaders or movements).

The survey also intends to test the three identity-based theories: Social Identity Theory, Identity Fusion Theory, and Brand Identity Fusion and determine which theory correlates the most strongly with Receptiveness and Support.

Interpreting Survey Results

- The survey results will be interpreted by examining the correlation between Social Identity Theory, Identity Fusion Theory, and Brand Identity Fusion with receptiveness to and support for populist leaders.
- The direction and strength of these correlations will reveal how each identity theory framework influences he degree of receptivess and support.
- A positive correlation suggests that higher levels of group identity or brand fusion correlate with greater support, while a negative correlation indicates the opposite.

Analyzing Survey Results

- The analysis will compare the correlations between the three theories to identify which has the strongest and most positive correlation to receptivess and support.
  - Pearson's correlation will quantify relationships, and scatterplots will visually present the data.
- Insights from this analysis will offer a deeper understanding the relationship between postmodern populist movements in consumer-driven, media-centric societies and political identity.

Section 1: Establishing Baseline Political Identity

How strongly do you identify with your current political party or movement?

1: Not at all
2: Slightly
3: Moderately
4: Strongly
5: Very strongly

How long have you identified with your political group?

1: Less than 6 months
2: 6 months to 1 year
3: 1 to 3 years
4: 3 to 5 years
5: More than 5 years

Which political party or movement do you most strongly identify with?

o Conservative
o Liberal
o Centrist
o Independent
o Other (Please specify)

How often do you engage in political activities?

1: Never
2: Rarely
3: Occassionally
4: Often
5: Always
6: Always

How much do you trust political leaders from other parties or movements?

1: Not at all
2: Slightly
3: Moderately
4: Strongly
5: Completely

Section 2: Measuring Receptiveness to Political Rhetoric

When a political leader I support speaks, I feel like their message is directly aimed at me.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I am more likely to be convinced by a political message that uses emotional or nationalistic appeals.

 1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

If a political leader uses rhetoric that appeals to my group's values, I am more likely to support their cause, even if I disagree with some policies.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I feel more inclined to support a leader whose messages reflect the problems and needs of my group.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

When I hear a political leader use rhetoric that appeals to my cultural or national identity, I feel more motivated to support them.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I tend to support political messages that portray my group as being in conflict with out-group groups.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I am more likely to share a political message if it resonates with my personal identity and values.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

When political leaders emphasize collective action for the greater good of my group, I feel more receptive to their message.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

When a political leader makes an emotional appeal that aligns with my group's concerns, I feel more inclined to take action.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

If a political message strongly emphasizes the importance of group unity, I am more likely to support it.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

Section 3: Measuring Support for Political Leaders or Movements

I feel personally connected to the leader of my political group.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I would support the leader of my political party even if they were involved in a scandal or controversy.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

If the political leader I support were under attack, I would defend them, even if it meant disagreeing with others.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I am willing to make personal sacrifices for the success the political leader I support or their movement, mission, and/or message.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I would be willing to volunteer or donate money if the political leader I support asked

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I feel a sense of pride when the political leader I support succeeds.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

Even if the political leader I support makes decisions I don't fully agree with, I continue to support them.

 1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I would actively encourage others to support the political leader I support

 1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I would still support my political leader if they changed their views on a particular issue.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree

I feel that my political leader understands the struggles and needs of my community.

1: Strongly disagree
2: Disagree
3: Neutral
4: Agree
5: Strongly Agree