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Whistleblowing in Political Parties:

The Moral Dilemma of Fairness and Loyalty

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Abstract

Whistleblowing is increasingly viewed as a valuable mechanism to root out misconduct in organisations, yet we know very little about the conditions under which it is used in political parties. Building upon literature from social psychology, we argue that the decision to blow the whistle is the outcome of a trade-off between two basic moral values that are particularly acute in the case of politicians: fairness and loyalty. Using a novel pre-registered survey experiment with over 1,000 Swedish politicians, this paper establishes that priming values of fairness can increase politician's willingness to blow the whistle against fellow party members. However, priming values of loyalty has no effect on whistleblowing intentions relative to control conditions, suggesting loyalty is the default value position for politicians. The results of this study have significant implications for understanding the impact of parties' organisational cultures on the willingness to speak out against misconduct.

Keywords
Whistleblowing; political parties; misconduct; elite experiment; moral foundations theory

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Introduction

> A person like me who has built his loyalty from the age of 14 /…/ it was almost a personal grievance to go out and criticize the system that you yourself have been involved in building. /.../
>
> We can't have people going around representing the party and behaving in a reprehensible way. /.../ We have to protect the party and we protect the party by making sure that things like this come to the surface so that we can deal with it.
>
> (A former local politician of the Swedish Social Democratic Party)

Misconduct in political parties presents a dilemma for politicians. On the one hand, politicians in democracies have a responsibility to act in a fair and just way, represent their constituents and uphold the rule of law. They cannot, as the quoted politician points out, transgress and behave inappropriately. At the same time, the quote also testifies to a sense of being deeply invested in the party. These strong feelings of duty and loyalty towards the party are prominent among politicians in most political systems; party members share an ideological affinity and identity with one another and have interests in the electoral success of their parties. The career prospects of politicians are also in many cases closely tied to their relationship with party leadership. When they witness or are the victim of misconduct from a party colleague, however, they are confronted with the dilemma of whether to speak up and blow the whistle or not.

The study of whistleblowing and its antecedents is nothing new in the fields of business ethics, organisational behaviour, and more recently psychology, but it has seldom been applied to political parties. Whistleblowing – the disclosure of information regarding misconduct or wrongdoing within an organisation (Near and Miceli 1985) – can take many forms; it can be internal within organisations, or external to third parties such as the media. The decision of which route an individual takes is believed to largely depend on the type and severity of misconduct (Near et al. 2004). The same is true when deciding whether to blow the whistle in the first place (Latan, Jabbour, and Jabbour 2019). This decision is more consistently related to contextual or situational factors than individual-level characteristics of witnesses or victims (Vadera, Aguilera, and Caza 2009). Reporting intentions are greater when perceived personal costs are lower, such as when the process can be anonymised (Ayers and Kaplan 2005), when there is a degree of support within the organisation (Bergeron and Thompson 2020), or when there are more opportunities for subsequent re-employment, as in the private sector (Rothschild and Miethe 1999). One of the strongest

influencers of an individuals' willingness to speak up is a strong ethical culture in the organisation (Kaptein 2011; Loe, Ferrell, and Mansfield 2000). The organisations themselves therefore have a considerable effect on how misconduct is perceived and treated.

It is unclear how the process should look in political parties, where ethical standards and the potential reputational costs of blowing the whistle on a party colleague are both high. We take inspiration from psychological research which has contended that the willingness of an individual to blow the whistle on misconduct or wrongdoing is the product of a trade-off between two basic moral values: fairness and loyalty (Waytz, Dungan, and Young 2013). We apply this framework to politicians who should consider both values to a similar degree; as public officials, politicians should act in a fair and just way, yet electoral and career incentives dictate that they should also be loyal to their party and not 'upset the apple cart'. Misconduct by party colleagues brings these two values into direct conflict with one another. We suggest that political parties can and do establish organisational cultures, and these cultures directly or indirectly determine the precedence of fairness vis-à-vis loyalty in potential whistleblowing situations. Whichever of these values is more prominent for politicians – as influenced by their party culture – will determine whistleblowing intentions and methods in the face of party misconduct. However, we also anticipate that the effect of value prominence is contingent on the severity of the misconduct and will have different implications for the choice of whether to call the misconduct out within or outside of the party.

These expectations are tested in a pre-registered experiment with a sample of 1053 Swedish politicians.[1] We use a priming approach to condition the relative salience of either fairness or loyalty and subsequently ask respondents about their internal and external whistleblowing intentions regarding a series of hypothetical misconduct scenarios. The results show that priming values of fairness increases the likelihood of politicians' intent to blow the whistle, but priming loyalty has no impact, suggesting that politicians' default position is more closely aligned with loyalty values. Further, we find that the effect of misconduct severity to be conditional on whether the misconduct was committed by an individual or the party collectively, and that the party's response (or lack thereof) to be a stronger predictor of external whistleblowing intentions than fairness value priming. This study contributes to our understanding of the incentives and

[1] Pre-registration available at: https://osf.io/xrp8m/?view_only=b9d046bc70234ff580f8f090c80c6ae1

behaviours of politicians regarding the tolerance of unethical behaviour in one of the most important democratic institutions: political parties. We also contribute to the understanding of organisational cultures in politics and how this can have beneficial or adverse consequences for politicians, party members, and voters.

Determinants of Whistleblowing

Several decades of research have documented at length the concept of whistleblowing in organisations. Classically defined, whistleblowing is "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near and Miceli 1985, p. 4).

According to this commonly adhered-to conceptualisation, the process can take place both internally within organisations and through external third parties such as the media or bespoke whistleblowing functions. Likewise, disclosures can be made horizontally (e.g., to colleagues at a similar management level) or vertically to a more senior individual or body. The nature of the disclosure is also unrestricted in this definition, which can be done in conjunction with revealing one's identity or anonymously. Certain organisational and situational factors often dictate how the process looks in practice, however. For example, internal whistleblowing – or reporting misconduct – in absence of formal whistleblowing procedures and infrastructure is generally not anonymous. Likewise, disclosing one's identity is often required to give credibility to accusations made through external channels such as the media (Flynn 2011). While the above definition of whistleblowing is conceptually and in theory quite broad, whistleblowing in practice tends to take on specific characteristics based on organisational and situational contexts.

Research on the determinants of whistleblowing primarily originates from the fields of business ethics and organisational behaviour. In this field, one of the main lines of enquiry has been the conditions under which certain individuals are more likely to report organisational wrongdoing and how (Culiberg and Mihelič 2017). Broadly, answers to this question can be broken down into three themes: the characteristics of the misconduct, individual characteristics of the whistleblower, and contextual/organisational factors.

Typologies characterizing organisational misconduct and wrongdoing range significantly from simple misdemeanours to large-scale public scandals (Brown 2008; Thompson 1999). Previous findings suggest that whistleblowing intentions tend to be greater when the transgressions they relate to are more severe or salient (Latan, Jabbour, and Jabbour 2019; Near et al. 2004). Yet there may also be a tension between the seriousness of the misconduct and the urge to report; while serious (or illegal) instances of misconduct are more important to put an end to, research has also demonstrated that one of the biggest reasons that individuals do not report misconduct is due to a fear of reprisal from the organisation (Cassematis and Wortley 2013; Somers and Casal 2011; Ayers and Kaplan 2005). Whistleblowers often face serious retaliations, such as ostracism, discrediting, denial of benefits and assignments, and ultimately dismissal (Hedin and and Månsson 2012; Liebes and Blum-Kulka 2004; Rothschild and Miethe 1999). These reprisals in turn may be more likely when the reputational costs for the organisation – such as those incurred by serious misconduct – are highest.

A second, albeit less consistent strand of research has considered the individual characteristics of would-be whistleblowers (Vadera, Aguilera, and Caza 2009). An individual's gender is a factor that has produced mixed results. More recent results suggest that females report a higher intention to report misconduct (Dalton and Radtke 2013), but this may also be contingent on the availability of anonymous reporting channels (Kaplan et al. 2009). There is more consistent evidence showing that whistleblowers tend to be middle-aged, performing well in their jobs, and in relatively senior positions in the organisation (Krambia-Kapardis 2020; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005). In short, these factors indicate individuals who feel more secure in their positions and thus perceive lower costs to speaking up.

Contextual determinants of whistleblowing primarily relate to the relation of the would-be whistleblower vis-á-vis the victim and the organisation. For instance, whistleblowing is more likely when there is a closer organisational or personal link to the victim (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005). The degree of support anticipated within the organisation can also affect the willingness to report misconduct through internal or external channels (Bergeron and Thompson 2020). While the type of organisation is not a focal theme of the whistleblowing literature, it has been considered as a context in studies that use survey methods to investigate the issue. Some studies focus on specific organisations or types of organisations, such as the military (Near et al.

2004), the police (Park and Blenkinsopp 2009), or other government agencies (Brown 2008). Other studies have pooled survey respondents across sectors and identified those in the private sector to be more likely than their public sector counterparts to blow the whistle due to lower exit costs and a greater ability to find re-employment (Krambia-Kapardis 2020; Rothschild and Miethe 1999), though these findings may be context-dependent (Berndtsson, Johansson, and Karlsson 2018).

Overall, the literature on the determinants of whistleblowing in organisations paints a picture that contextual and situational factors are a far more consistent predictors of when whistleblowing will occur than individual characteristics of organisation members. Ultimately, this suggests the precedence of institutional structures and systems that facilitate the willingness and ability of individuals to step forward. Important to note, however, is that not much of the research above concerns strictly political organisations, and none concerns political parties; although these organisations operate at the heart of democracy and constitute a key link between the political elite and citizens (Katz and Müller 1997; Ware 1987). With their unique hierarchical structures and close ideological bonds – in addition to the strong interest of members at all levels (not just management) to maintain a positive external reputation – parties and politicians are a black box of whistleblowing research.

Whistleblowing in parties: Theoretical expectations

Waytz, Dungan and Young (2013) characterise the willingness to blow the whistle as the result of a trade-off between two of the five basic moral values of moral foundations theory (Graham et al. 2011): fairness and loyalty. Fairness-oriented values relate to justice in that all individuals should be treated in an even-handed and equal way. Loyalty, in contrast, relates to the preferential treatment or favouring of the in-group – even in cases where individuals of that group may be in the wrong (Graham et al. 2011). In the case of whistleblowing, these two values are said to come into direct conflict with one another. All else equal, if contextual factors lead an individual to prioritise fairness over loyalty to the party, then whistleblowing will be more likely, and vice versa. While their argument refers to the individual level, we extend their contention and argue that organisational culture takes a position on this same loyalty-fairness continuum when misconduct occurs within an organisation. We suggest that this is a particularly challenging proposition for political parties, which are comprised of political officials who are duty-bound to act in a fair and

just way on the one hand and have high incentives for loyalty to party institutions and leadership on the other.

There are several reasons why we would expect politicians to blow the whistle when experiencing misconduct. In their role as political officials, politicians are likely to feel a moral responsibility to act in the best interests of their constituents. By reporting misconduct committed by other party members, or the party organization, individual politicians may demonstrate that they stand up for what is right and fair and thus gain the trust and respect of their voters, something which may benefit them personally, as well as the party in future elections. Politicians may also be more willing to speak up given their (to varying extents) high profiles and typically extrovert personality-types (Bjørkelo, Einarsen, and Matthiesen 2010). Furthermore, as the operatives of democracy, politicians work under the principles of the rule of law and justice. They are therefore well-placed and typically well-informed to act in a fair way and ensure that those around them do the same. Lastly, while whistleblowing is mostly said to be driven by fairness concerns, reporting party misconduct may also be an attempt to do the party a favour, e.g., by saving it from a few 'bad apples' who are misbehaving and who risk becoming a liability to the party. Blowing the whistle in such cases is in line with the interests of the party if this report prevents or supresses a (even bigger) scandal. An act of fairness may thus be intended as an act of loyalty. For these reasons, one would expect politicians to be among the most likely in society to speak up about misconduct they become aware of.

At the same time, there are also several reasons why politicians might not want to blow the whistle when they witness misconduct in their party. Blowing the whistle on one's own organisation – particularly externally – can come with severe reprisals for the whistleblower and significant reputational costs for the organisation they belong to. Politicians may not therefore want to reveal negative information about a party they support ideologically, even despite instances of misconduct, for fear of electoral punishment by voters. The popularity of the organisation is typically not something that would be as much of a concern for a whistleblower in the private sector, for example. A witness may also fear negative consequences for their own career prospects if they show disloyalty by blowing the whistle on a colleague's behaviour. Such actions may result in them being pushed down the ballot list or even kicked out of the party. Arguably, political parties are unique in the high exit costs they impose on potential whistleblowers; the cost of

publicly exposing organisational misconduct in a political party vis-á-vis a private sector organisation is likely far greater due to the restricted ability of the whistleblower to find an alternative position in a rival political party, for example.

The organisational culture within parties could be a key element in determining whether a politician blows the whistle or not. More specifically, ethical cultures – defined as an aspect of organisational culture that influences employees' ethical behaviour through formal and informal structures and systems (Treviño 1990) – are one of the factors most consistently associated with the willingness to call out wrongdoing (Kaptein 2011; Loe, Ferrell, and Mansfield 2000). At the same time, organisational cultures and practices can also normalise unethical behaviour such as corruption (Ashforth and Anand 2003).

Ultimately, we expect the default position for the typical politician to try to act in both a fair and loyal way. Indeed, individuals who consider themselves to be more motivated by fairness and/or loyalty are perhaps more likely to enter politics than individuals who have other motivations. When these values are pitted against one another, however – as in the case of witnessing misconduct within their own party – we expect the prominent value to determine a preferred course of action: namely, whether to blow the whistle or not. The prominence of values for politicians can be reinforced by, among other factors, formal and informal structures and systems leading to an organisational culture established and reinforced by fellow party members and party leadership. That is, we argue that political parties have the capacity to emphasise these values and instil a culture that may prioritise one value over the other and make it a (relatively) more prominent value for a political official from that party. We therefore develop the following baseline hypotheses:

H1a. Politicians will be more likely to blow the whistle on misconduct when their democratic duty to act in a fair or just way is more prominent.

H1b. Politicians will be less likely to blow the whistle on misconduct when their duty to remain loyal to their party is more prominent.

In addition, we also expect the intention to blow the whistle on misconduct – that is, the point at which fairness trumps loyalty – to be contingent on the severity of the misconduct (Latan, Jabbour, and Jabbour 2019). Less severe instances of wrongdoing may more easily be ignored or not deemed significant enough issues to disrupt harmony within the party, or may not be worth the

high costs incurred by revealing misconduct. We therefore expect that the effect of fairness being the more prominent value on whistleblowing intention will be stronger when the misconduct is more severe, and the effect of loyalty being more prominent should make this effect weaker. Likewise, when misconduct is less severe, we expect that loyalty prominence will be more effective and fairness less so.

H2a. Politicians will be more likely to blow the whistle when the misconduct is more severe.

H2b. In more severe misconduct cases, the fairness priming effect will be stronger, and the loyalty priming effect weaker.

H2c. In less severe misconduct cases, the loyalty priming effect will be stronger, and the fairness priming effect weaker.

Given the high reputational costs for the organisation in which a misconduct occurs, combined with the ideological affinity politicians have with their parties, we also expect politicians' baseline preference for reporting to be internal through party channels rather than external. Previous research has highlighted how reporting misconduct can be dependent on the perceived level of organisational support (Bergeron and Thompson 2020). We connect these findings with organisational cultures of fairness and loyalty and suggest that when loyalty is prominent, the misconduct that is reported should be done so internally. Conversely, we expect a higher propensity to blow the whistle externally when fairness is the prominent value.

H3a: Politicians will be more likely to blow the whistle internally than externally.

H3b: External whistleblowing will be more likely when fairness is more prominent.

H3c: Internal whistleblowing will be more likely when loyalty to the party is more prominent.

Research Design

We test these hypotheses using a pre-registered survey experiment of 1,053 Swedish politicians operating at the local, regional, or national level(s), conducted between November 2024 and

January 2025.[2] The experiment was embedded in the Politikerpanel, a panel of Swedish politicians administered by the SOM (Society, Opinion and Media) Institute, which is fielded twice annually and asks respondents about their views on Swedish society.

Sweden is an appropriate case for this study because we expect fairness and loyalty to be similarly (highly) valued by politicians. Sweden has high levels of social trust (Esaiasson et al. 2021) and standards of gender equality, and a relatively low tolerance of corruption (Erlingsson and Kristinsson 2019). There is also a high degree of legal protection for whistleblowers (Bauhr and Grimes 2017). Some parties have dedicated internal whistleblowing functions, and all parties that are represented at the Swedish national parliament (Riksdag) have formal ethical codes and guidelines for members, though these are not always strictly enforced (Andersson and Larue 2022). At the same time, Swedish parties have significant control over nomination procedures as well as the order in which candidates appear on ballot lists. An individual's career progression is therefore highly dependent on their relationship to party leadership. The major parties in Sweden are also represented at local, regional, and national levels so scandals could potentially have electoral costs across all levels. We therefore have reason to expect that fairness and loyalty are both major motivations for the behaviour of politicians in Sweden.

Experimental set-up

As we are interested in the implications of a trade-off between two moral values (fairness and loyalty), we use a priming approach to treat respondents by increasing the prominence of one of these values relative to the other. This is intended to mimic organisational (party) cultures that place greater emphasis on one of these values relative to the other. Our sample is split into three groups. A first group is presented with a textual and visual treatment demonstrating the value voters place on loyalty for politicians based on previous research. Subsequently, they are presented with several factors that can make loyalty to the party an important value for politicians, and asked to select which of these factors they consider most important to them. The priming information

[2] Our expectations are not limited to politicians working at any specific level of political assignment, and in Sweden it is not uncommon for politicians to have positions on more than one level. While it may be the case that politicians working at the national level may be more aware of electoral costs, local, regional, and national elections occur in Sweden simultaneously, so we expect politicians across different levels to consider the national electoral cost for their party relatively equally.

therefore includes preference-based cues as relates to the electorate (what voters want or expect) and normative/utility cues (why this value is important). The question is also designed to engage the respondent with the content of the text and encourage cognitive processing to a greater degree than simply reading it. A second group is presented with a similar treatment and identical question, but the text refers to the importance of fairness of politicians. A third pure control group does not receive any treatment information.[3]

Our priming treatments are therefore explicit in that they refer directly to the concepts we are interested in, but they are abstracted from whistleblowing and misconduct. This serves two purposes. First, explicit priming is a more internally valid approach, as we can have greater certainty that treatments will make salient the values we aim to prime. Secondly, explicit primes are more appropriate in this case as we aim to draw conclusions about parties as organisations that can instil certain cultures or values through explicit means (policy positions, internal memos, codes of conduct, etc). Our treatment stimuli are therefore more representative of how parties could try to influence the conduct of its members and officials.

Following the priming stage, respondents of all groups are presented with a series of four hypothetical scenarios in a randomized order and asked about their whistleblowing intention on a 1-7 scale.[4] The four scenarios detail incidences of misconduct that vary across two dimensions: severity (low vs. high) and type (personal conduct and internal party decision-making). These scenarios are designed to be representative of the most common incidents of misconducts in political parties (Niklasson et al. 2024).[5] Following the scenario, respondents are asked how likely they would be in each case to report the issue to (a) a senior member in the party, (b) an authority figure outside of the party, or (c) a journalist.[6][7] We include two measures of the willingness to blow the whistle externally ((b) and (c)) to prevent respondents from being discouraged from

[3] The treatment texts are available in Appendix C.
[4] Main results are replicated with samples limited to only the first, second, third, and fourth scenarios presented respectively. Results are robust to this variation (see Appendix E).
[5] For full scenario texts see Appendix B.
[6] Scenarios C & D only have the first and last of these as external authority figures are not considered a realistic reporting channel for party decision-making decisions.
[7] After each scenario, we also simulate a lack of action on behalf of the party by asking respondents who signalled an intention to report internally to imagine a situation in which several weeks had passed, and nothing appeared to have changed following the incident. These respondents were then prompted to signal their intentions again. This is designed to reflect how reporting organisational misconduct may occur in parties and allows us to additionally test how the reactivity (of lack thereof) of the party affects the whistleblowing process.

reporting external whistleblowing simply because they would not do one or the other. For example, a respondent may consider reporting misconduct to an external authority figure if they perceived the transgression to be serious enough, but under no condition would they report this to the media (or vice versa). We therefore bisect the external option to avoid this potential conflict.

By asking about several instances of misconduct that vary along two dimensions (severity and type), this design mimics a conjoint design in that these scenarios can be pooled and the dimensions in which they vary can be analysed as covariates. The difference in this case is that respondents were asked about all four scenarios and as such all dimensions of variation. This design also removes the requirement to force a respondent to pick one option (or misconduct) over another, which can risk creating false impressions of an effect where in reality the respondent may not blow the whistle in either scenario.

Results

This section documents the results of a series of analyses that assess each of the study's hypotheses. The general approach taken is to pool and average whistleblowing intention responses across scenarios and outcome questions by respondent, thereby creating an overall whistleblowing intention measure for each participant. The heterogeneous effects anticipated by hypothesis sets 2 and 3 are investigated by calculating alternative whistleblowing intention measures that are based only on the more/less severe scenarios, for example. This approach means that we are able to investigate each hypothesis with the same three-group (control, fairness and loyalty) set-up, with the same number of respondents – and as such the same statistical power – in each test. The only aspects altered between tests are the scenarios and outcome measures considered. For each analysis, the appropriate measure of whistleblowing intention is regressed on treatment group, age, gender, education and a measure of seniority within the party. All models also include party fixed effects as we are more theoretically interested in difference within rather than between parties.

Fairness vs. loyalty priming effects

Our baseline results regarding H1a and H1b are illustrated in Figure 1. We find support for H1a in that the coefficient plot illustrates a significant increase in the likelihood of reporting misconduct for the group primed with fairness relative to the control group ($t = 3.02$). The point estimate of 0.21 equates to 23% of the standard deviation of the mean whistleblowing intention variable (0.92),

which is a considerable effect size. Regarding H1b, however, we do not observe a statistical difference between those primed with loyalty to the party and the control group. H1b anticipates a decreased likelihood of reporting misconduct relative to the control group, while the Figure 1 indicates a positive and statistically insignificant association.

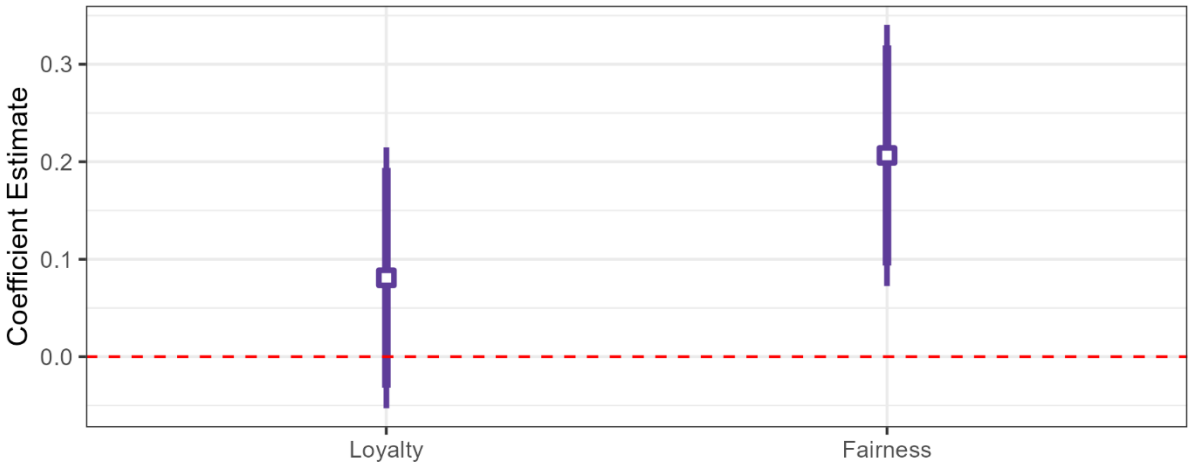

Figure 1. Coefficient plot of the effect of fairness and loyalty primes on whistleblowing intention. The dependent variable is the likelihood of reporting misconduct, averaged across all channels and scenarios. Confidence intervals are represented by vertical lines at the 90% (thick) and 95% (thin) levels. The horizontal dashed red line represents the control group.

There are several potential explanations for this result. First, one interpretation is that members of political parties with more loyal organisational cultures are no more or less likely to report misconduct than politicians in general. However, given that we do observe a significant difference with the fairness group (and fairness and loyalty are thought to be countervailing motivations in this context), this interpretation is not entirely satisfactory. Second, it could also be possible that the loyalty prime does not sufficiently "treat" the subject and what is rather reported here is a potentially false negative. However, given the significant result produced by the fairness group as well as the almost identical nature of the priming treatment for both groups, this interpretation is also unsatisfactory. We believe the most logical explanation of this result lies in the fact that the baseline level of loyalty in the control group is of a similar level to the loyalty group post-treatment. In other words, the default position of politicians (i.e., control) is loyalty to the party. We verify the effectiveness of our treatments by including a two manipulation check questions asking all

respondents post-treatment (where applicable) on a 1-7 scale how important it is for politicians to act in a (a) fair and (b) loyal way. For each question, there is a greater difference between the control group and the fairness group (differences of 0.07 and 0.20) than between the control group and loyalty group, which are very similar (0.02 and 0.01). For a full comparison between treatment groups of manipulation check and outcome variable distributions, see Appendix D.

Nature of misconduct & reporting channel

We now turn to consider how the willingness to blow the whistle may also be conditioned by the nature of misconduct and the reporting channel. First, Figure 2 demonstrates the mean likelihood of whistleblowing based on the four scenarios presented to respondents. Willingness to report is evidently higher in more severe misconduct cases, though the contrast is much more stark in the case of misconduct committed by an individual than by the party collectively. In cases of the latter, there is only a marginal difference in the willingness to blow the whistle across the two scenarios. Thus, while we have descriptive support for H2a, this appears limited to certain types of misconduct.

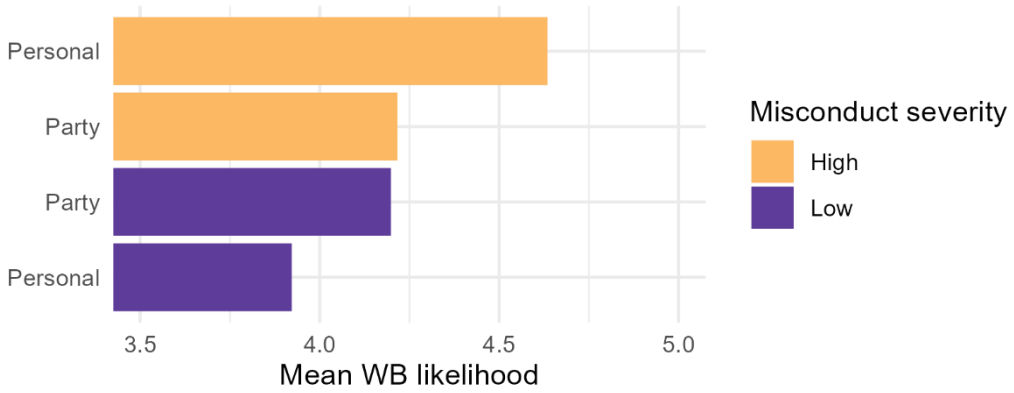

Figure 2. A bar plot illustrating the mean likelihood of whistleblowing across misconduct type (referring to an individual or the party) and severity. WB likelihood is the average value across all reporting channels. The dependent variable is on a 1-7 scale.

We consider how this consideration interacts with our treatment variables in the coefficient plots presented in the left-hand panel in Figure 3. Surprisingly, and in contrast to the expectations of

H2b and H2c, the severity of misconduct has little impact on the priming effects of fairness or loyalty. Thus, this result indicates that politicians in parties that reinforce a culture of fairness to a greater extent are equally more likely to report misconduct that is more or less severe.

The right-hand panel in Figure 3 considers the expectations formulated in hypotheses H3b and H3c, namely that external whistleblowing should be more likely for the fairness group, and internal whistleblowing (or reporting) should be more likely in the loyalty group. While we observe a higher point estimate for external vis-á-vis internal whistleblowing in the fairness group, this comparison does not yield a statistically significant result and as such H3b is not confirmed. In sum, the results presented in Figure 3 do not indicate a conditional nature of the relationship between organizational culture and whistleblowing intention. In each case, the group primed with fairness are more likely to call out misconduct than the control group and the group primed with loyalty are not.[8]

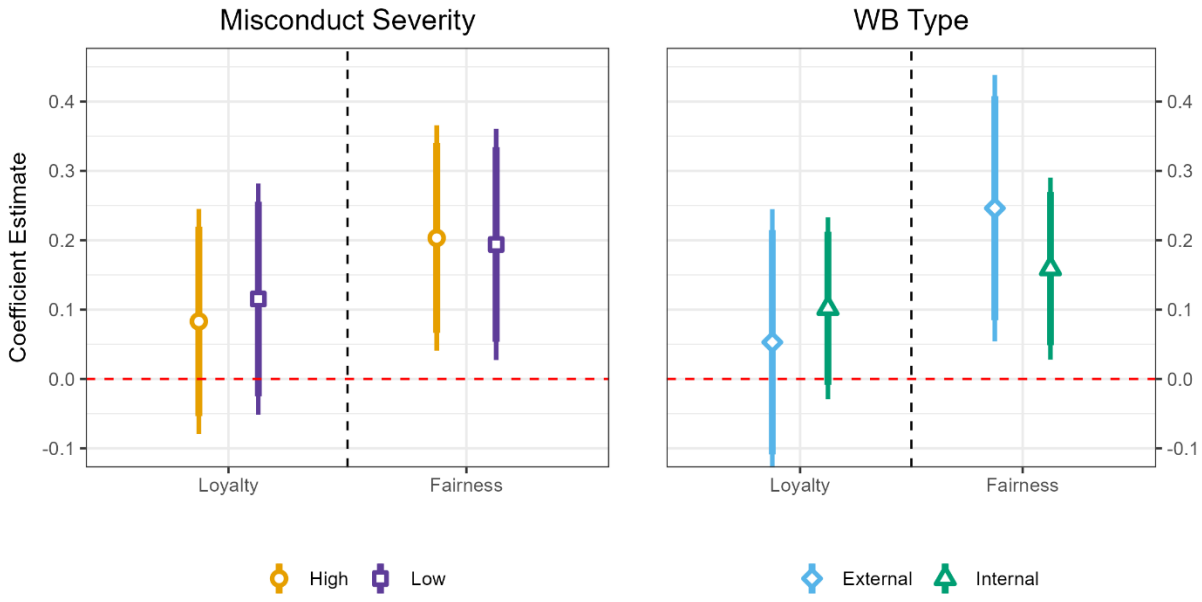

Figure 3. Coefficient plot of the effect of fairness and loyalty primes on whistleblowing intention across levels of misconduct severity (left-hand panel) and reporting channel (right-hand panel). The dependent variable is the likelihood of reporting misconduct, averaged across relevant channels and scenarios at the

[8] Furthermore, in Appendix F we test treatment effects for each scenario individually and find no significant deviation from the main effects presented in Figure 1,

respondent level. Confidence intervals are represented by vertical lines at the 90% (thick) and 95% (thin) levels. The horizontal dashed red line represents the control group.

Party Reactions

In a final step, we explore situations in which initial attempts to report misconduct internally have been unsuccessful. This is a frequent occurrence that in many cases has been cited as motivation to move to external whistleblowing as an alternative to internal reporting. Following the presentation of each scenario to respondents, a question was also presented in which they were asked to imagine that they had internally reported the misconduct, and that several weeks had since passed without a reaction from the party to address the situation. Respondents were subsequently asked once again about their intent to report internally and externally.

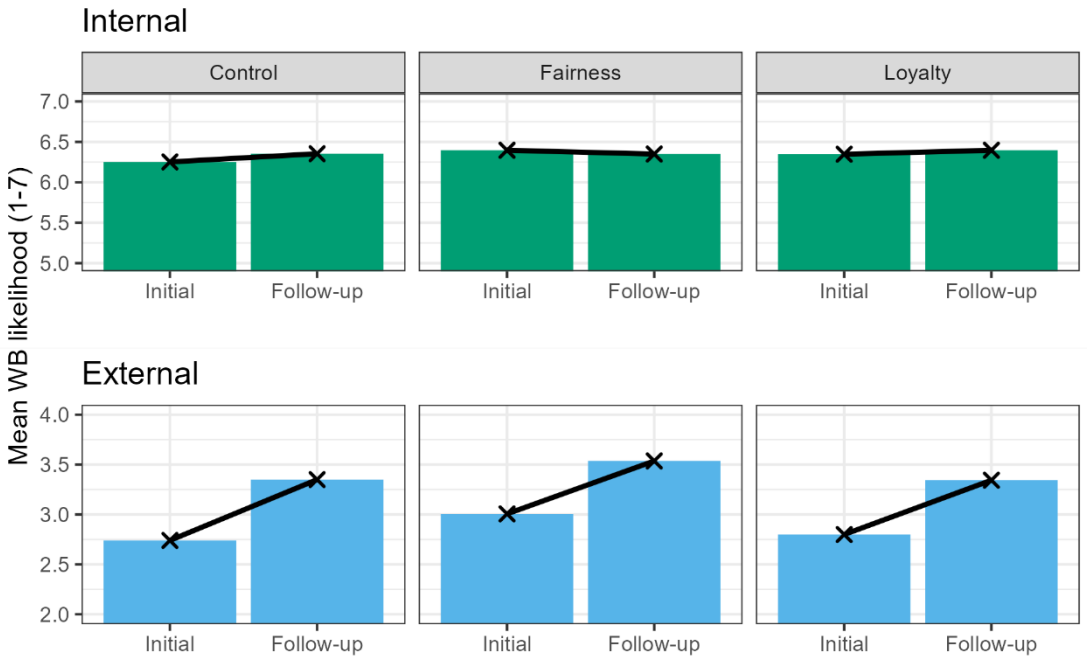

Figure 4. Bar plots of mean internal (top row) and external (bottom row) whistleblowing likelihood for each experimental group. The two bars in each plot demonstrate the average reporting likelihood in the initial phase and follow-up phase (i.e., when the party is said not to have responded to the initial report). The line between the two bars illustrates the change in likelihood of reporting from one phase to the other.

Figure 4 compares internal and external reporting intentions for initial and follow-up questions (where the party are reported to have not acted) for each treatment group. What is evident from this figure is that the likelihood of reporting externally (what is colloquially more thought of as whistleblowing) is considerably more likely in response to party inaction. A similar increase is not observed for the likelihood of reporting internally.[9] Interestingly this finding is almost identical across treatment groups and the control group, suggesting that the effect of a fairness-based organisational culture may be contingent on the anticipation of the party acting in a fair way. When acting in a fair way is not reciprocated by the party, politicians act no differently in parties with fairness-oriented or loyalty-oriented organisational cultures.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper uses experimental evidence from Sweden to establish that priming fairness can influence politicians' willingness to blow the whistle on misconduct in their parties. The converse effect is not found for priming loyalty, which may indicate that loyalty is the baseline moral orientation for politicians. At the same time, we find that willingness to blow the whistle is related to the severity of misconduct when misconduct is committed by individuals rather than the party collectively. This may indicate that the theorized trade-off between fairness and loyalty is less clear than could be expected. To report a misbehaving individual may be perceived by a politician as an act of fairness, i.e., to stand up for what is morally right, but also as an act of loyalty, i.e., to save the party from individuals who may cause internal disharmony or even public scandals. At the same time, our results suggest that fairness and loyalty cultures do not disproportionately affect the likelihood of internal vis-á-vis external whistleblowing. However, the parties' response (or lack thereof) to internal reports markedly impacts the likelihood of blowing the whistle externally.

It must be noted that our study bases its measures and conclusion on whistleblowing *intention* rather than actual whistleblowing behaviour, which is notoriously difficult to capture in survey settings (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran 2005). However, our primary interest here has been to identify the point at which politicians as a unique population value fairness-motivated behaviour (blowing the whistle) vis-à-vis loyalty-motivated behaviour. Respondents therefore likely reported

[9] That being said, due to the high baseline likelihood of reporting internally for all groups (over 6 in the 1-7 scale), there may be ceiling effects at play here so these results should be interpreted with some caution.

what they felt they *ought* to do rather than what they actually would do have done in a given situation. The gap between these two answers (if indeed there is one) is not the focus of this study. Indeed, while it is possible that there is some degree of social desirability bias in the answers given to these questions, it is not obvious what the more socially desirable answer is for politicians. We therefore consider the dependent variable measures to be valid indicators of whistleblowing intention. The findings of this paper provide insight into the impact of party-organisational orientations toward the two foundational moral values of fairness and loyalty and the consequences for the behaviour of politicians. Here we provide evidence that parties can affect the willingness of their members to step forward and call out wrongdoing. At the same time, we also argue that this must be done actively and with intent, as the baseline moral orientation of politicians is closer to loyalty than fairness. Our finding that the impact of misconduct severity is conditional on the type of misconduct is also of note. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that loyalty – as primed here and as perceived generally by politicians – may relate more to the party than their party colleagues. In this context, politicians may feel as though they are acting in an equally fair *and* loyal way when reporting misconduct committed by one 'bad apple'. This is a contribution to the literature and adds further nuance to the discussion of whistleblowing and its relation to moral foundations theory.

A further finding to highlight is that a seemingly important factor in the likelihood of *external* reporting is the inaction of the party in response to these reports. This is suggestive of an expectation of fairness on the part of the party which, when reneged on, increases politicians' willingness to speak up outside of the party. Taking immediate and firm action against misconduct when it is reported internally is therefore in the self-interest of parties who do not wish to risk that reports reach the public instead.

Due to the novelty of the study, we cannot know for sure what the scope conditions are, but we consider it very plausible that our results would travel to most other western European countries with parliamentary systems, where parties and party labels are strong and tolerance for misconduct relatively low. In regions and systems with less stable party systems the fairness-loyalty trade-off seems less certain. The same applies for presidential systems, and in particular for those with PR systems where parties and party labels matter less. This uncertainty makes further studies on this topic highly relevant.

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Appendix A: Summary statistics

Overall

Variable	N	Mean	St. dev	Min	Max
*Age group**	1053	4.68	1.30	1	6
Female	1053	1.34	0.51	1	4
Education level	1053	6.74	1.96	1	9
Seniority	1053	0.72	0.45	0	1
Internal WB	1051	6.33	0.90	1	7
External WB	1049	2.85	1.31	1	7
Overall WB	1052	4.25	0.92	1	7
Manipulation check: fairness	1045	6.51	0.89	1	7
Manipulation check: loyalty	1032	5.82	1.22	1	7

Table A1. Sample summary statistics: full sample. *Age is re-coded into categories. Larger values indicate older groups.

Control

Variable	N	Mean	St. dev	Min	Max
Age group	360	4.74	1.33	1	6
Female	360	1.34	0.5	1	4
Education level	360	6.66	1.96	1	9
Seniority	360	0.71	0.45	0	1
Internal WB	360	6.25	0.98	1	7
External WB	359	2.74	1.27	1	7
Overall WB	360	4.16	0.91	1	7
Manipulation check: fairness	355	6.49	0.92	1	7
Manipulation check: loyalty	352	5.88	1.27	1	7

Table A2. Sub-sample summary statistics: control group

Treatment: Fairness

Variable	N	Mean	St. dev	Min	Max
Age group	344	4.62	1.32	1	6
Female	344	1.31	0.51	1	4
Education level	344	6.85	1.99	1	9
Seniority	344	0.72	0.45	0	1
Internal WB	344	6.40	0.80	1	7
External WB	344	3.01	1.38	1	7
Overall WB	344	4.37	0.93	1	7

Manipulation check: fairness	342	6.56	0.83	1	7
Manipulation check: loyalty	338	5.68	1.24	1	7

Table A3. Sub-sample summary statistics: fairness treatment group

Treatment: Loyalty

Variable	**N**	**Mean**	**St. dev**	**Min**	**Max**
Age group	349	4.68	1.24	1	6
Female	349	1.37	0.53	1	4
Education level	349	6.71	1.93	1	9
Seniority	349	0.72	0.45	0	1
Internal WB	347	6.35	0.90	1	7
External WB	346	2.80	1.29	1	7
Overall WB	348	4.24	0.92	1	7
Manipulation check: fairness	348	6.47	0.92	1	7
Manipulation check: loyalty	342	5.89	1.12	1	7

Table A4. Sub-sample summary statistics: loyalty treatment group

Appendix B. Survey questions

Background questions

1. Are you…
    - Male
    - Female
    - Other
    - Do not wish to disclose
2. In which year were you born? [recoded into age groups to preserve anonymity]
3. What is your highest level of education?
    - Not completed primary school
    - Primary school
    - Secondary school or equivalent, less than 3 years
    - Secondary school or equivalent, 3 years or more
    - Post-secondary education, not university, less than 3 years
    - Post-secondary education, not university, 3 years or longer
    - College/university, less than 3 years
    - College/university, 3 years or longer
    - Postgraduate degree
4. To which party do you belong?
    - Left Party
    - Social Democrats
    - Centre Party
    - Liberal Party
    - Moderate Party
    - Christian Democrats
    - Green Party
    - Sweden Democrats
    - Other (specify)
5. Do you currently hold the following positions as i) regular member or ii) alternate:
    - Member of a committee (municipality or region)
    - Member of a municipality board
    - Member of a regional board
    - Member of national parliament
    - Minister in government
    - Member of European parliament
    - Other (specify)

Experimental section

Now follow some questions about internal affairs and misconduct within political parties.

--

[PRESENTATION OF TREATMENT TEXT FOR RELEVANT GROUP (A,B,C)]

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Scenario A: harassment – less severe

Imagine a situation where you regularly witness a fellow party member making persistent, inappropriate comments about the appearance and personal lives of colleagues. Although these remarks do not escalate to overt sexual harassment, the repeated nature of the behavior creates a hostile work environment for you and your colleagues.

How likely would you be in this case to report this through the following channels?

1. *Internally (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
2. *Externally, to an agency or organization (e.g., discrimination agency, union, police, etc.) [1-7]*
3. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Imagine that you reported the situation internally. Several weeks have now passed and the situation has not improved. Nothing seems to have been done regarding the matter. How likely would you be in this case to report the incidents:

1. *Internally, again (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
2. *Externally, to an agency or organization (e.g., discrimination agency, union, police, etc.) [1-7]*
3. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Scenario B: harassment – more severe

Imagine a situation where you regularly witness a fellow party member engaging in a pattern of clear instances of sexual harassment within the workplace. The misconduct includes persistent unwelcome physical advances, inappropriate touching, and unwelcome phone calls, creating an increasingly hostile environment for you and your colleagues.

How likely would you be in this case to report this through the following channels?

4. *Internally (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
5. *Externally, to an agency or organization (e.g., discrimination agency, union, police, etc.) [1-7]*
6. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Imagine that you reported the situation internally. Several weeks have now passed and the situation has not improved. Nothing seems to have been done regarding the matter. How likely would you be in this case to report the incidents:

4. *Internally, again (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
5. *Externally, to an agency or organization (e.g., discrimination agency, union, police, etc.) [1-7]*
6. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Scenario C: decision-making – less severe

Imagine a situation where discover that group of party colleagues are being systematically excluded from policy discussions within the party. They are often not invited to meetings and when they are, information is withheld from them beforehand which hinders their ability to contribute effectively.

How likely would you be in this case to report this through the following channels?

7. *Internally (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
8. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Imagine that you reported the situation internally. Several weeks have now passed and the situation has not improved. Nothing seems to have been done regarding the matter. How likely would you be in this case to report the incidents:

7. *Internally, again (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
8. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Scenario D: decision-making – more severe

Imagine a situation where you notice that several highly qualified and experienced candidates in your party are regularly excluded from the electoral lists in favor of candidates with less experience and qualifications, but with personal connections to key figures within the party.

How likely would you be in this case to report this through the following channels?

9. *Internally (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
10. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Imagine that you reported the situation internally. Several weeks have now passed and the situation has not improved. Nothing seems to have been done regarding the matter. How likely would you be in this case to report the incidents:

9. *Internally, again (e.g., to the responsible person or process for such matters in the party) [1-7]*
10. *Externally, to a journalist [1-7]*

Manipulation check

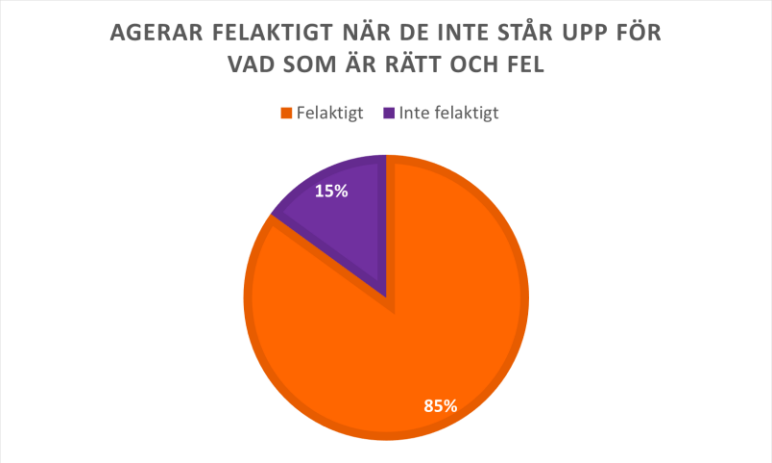
How important do you think fairness and loyalty are for politicians in their roles as elected officials?

- Fairness [1-7]
- Loyalty [1-7]

Appendix C: Priming treatments

Group A:

[*Fairness is important for politicians for several reasons. For example, in a recent study called "The effects of politician's moral violations on voters' moral emotions", researchers found that 85% of those surveyed perceived politicians to be in the wrong when they were perceived not to be acting in a fair way (Walter and Redlawsk 2023).*

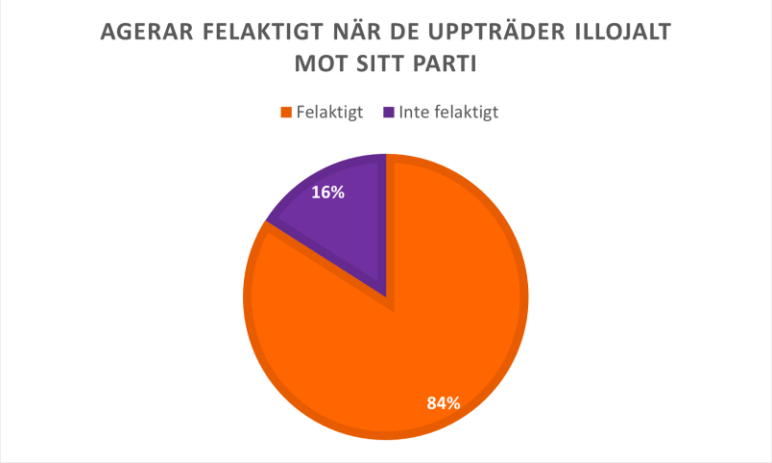


Which of the following reasons do you agree with the most:

a) ***Collaboration and Co-operation:*** *Fairness fosters a positive and collaborative atmosphere among politicians. When colleagues perceive that they are treated fairly, they are more likely to work together, share ideas, and collaborate on policy initiatives.*
b) ***Democratic Values:*** *Fairness is a fundamental democratic value. In democratic systems, the principle of equal representation and the fair treatment of all citizens are vital for the legitimacy of the political process.*
c) ***Public Trust:*** *Fairness enhances public trust in political institutions and leaders. When citizens perceive that politicians act with fairness and impartiality, it strengthens the trust in the political system.*
d) ***Rule of Law:*** *Politicians play a key role in upholding the rule of law. Fairness in legislative processes, policy implementation, and law enforcement is essential for maintaining a just and orderly society.*
e) ***Social Cohesion:*** *Fairness promotes inclusivity, reducing societal divisions. Politicians prioritizing fairness contribute to social harmony and cohesion by addressing inequalities and ensuring equitable representation.*
f) ***Other:*** *please specify*

Group B:

[*Loyalty is important for politicians for several reasons. In a recent study called "The effects of politician's moral violations on voters' moral emotions", researchers found for example that 84% of those surveyed perceived politicians to be in the wrong when they were perceived not to be acting in a loyal way (Walter and Redlawsk 2023).*



Which of the following reasons do you agree with the most:

a) ***Party Unity:*** *Political loyalty fosters a sense of unity within a party. Politicians aligning with a party's principles and policies contribute to a cohesive and effective party structure.*
b) ***Voter Trust:*** *Loyalty signals consistency to voters. Politicians who adhere to party platforms gain trust by providing a clear and predictable stance on key issues, fostering voter confidence.*
c) ***Resource Allocation:*** *Party loyalty often results in increased support, including financial contributions, endorsements, and campaign resources. Politicians benefit from party resources, aiding in electoral campaigns and political initiatives.*
d) ***Legislative Influence:*** *In parliamentary systems, loyalty influences party discipline. Politicians voting in alignment with the party contribute to legislative strength, ensuring the party's policy agenda is advanced effectively.*
e) ***Career Advancement:*** *Loyalty is often rewarded with leadership positions within the party or appointments to key roles. Politicians who demonstrate commitment and loyalty are more likely to climb the political hierarchy and influence party decisions.*
f) ***Other:*** *Please specify*

Group C:

[no treatment text]

Appendix D: Manipulation checks

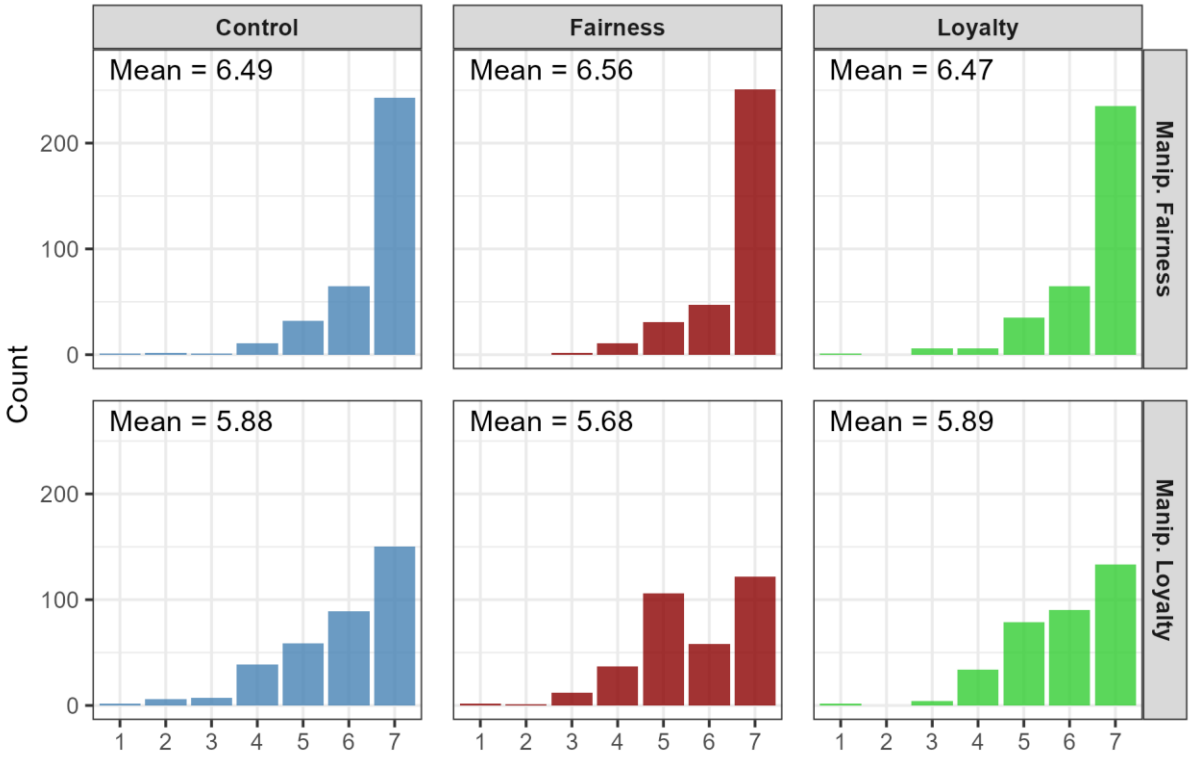


Figure A1. Distributions of the manipulation checks, by treatment group. Manipulation check question reads: "How important do you think fairness and loyalty are for politicians in their roles as elected officials?". Distributions presented for the fairness on the top row (1-7), and loyalty on the bottom row. The top-left corner of each panel also includes the group mean.

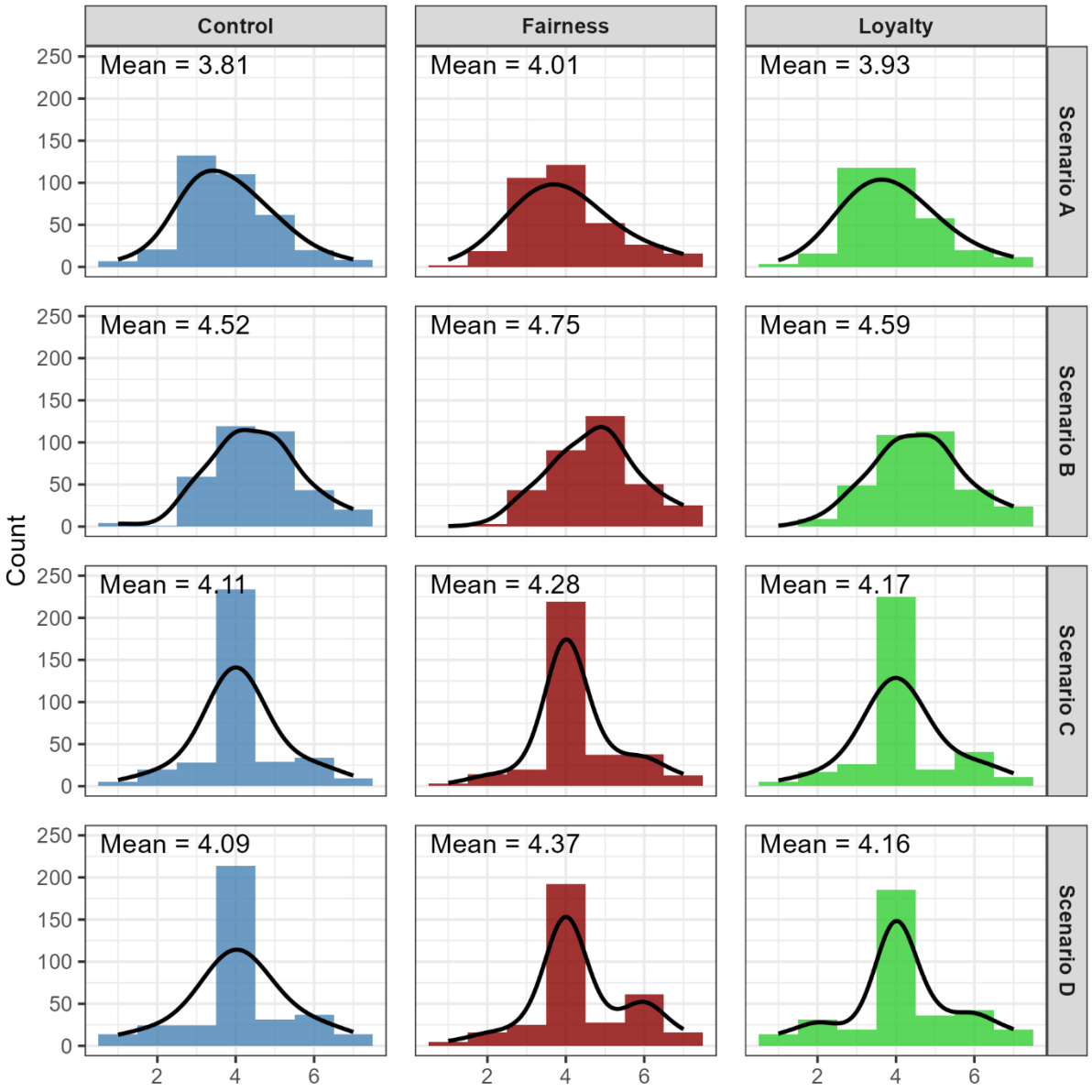


Figure A2. Distributions of mean whistleblowing likelihood (unweighted average of all reporting likelihood questions) by group (columns) for each scenario (rows). Each panel also includes the mean for the respective group.

Appendix E: Analysis by scenario presentation order

Figure A3. Replication of the baseline analysis (Figure 1) with restricted samples to only the scenario presented to the respondent first, second, third, and fourth, respectively. The consistency between the left-hand panel (1st scenario only) and the others suggests no spillover treatments between scenarios.

Appendix F: Baseline test (H1) by scenario

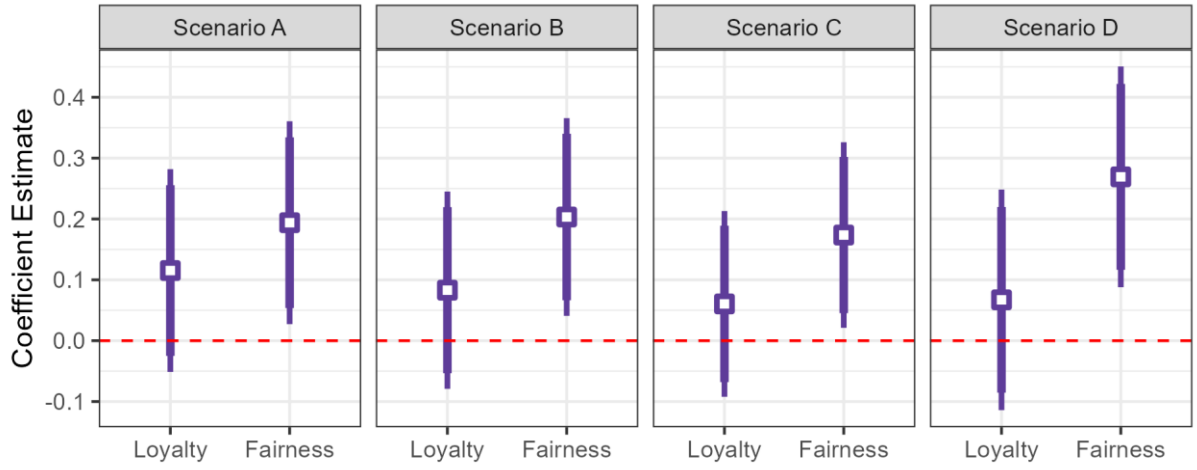


Figure A4. Replication of the baseline analysis (Figure 1) with disaggregated (by scenario) outcome measures.