



## A desire for deviance: The influence of leader normativeness and inter-group competition on group member support



Jin Wook Chang<sup>a,\*</sup>, Nazlı Turan<sup>b</sup>, Rosalind M. Chow<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Carnegie Mellon University, USA

<sup>b</sup> Católica-Lisbon School of Business and Economics Portugal

### HIGHLIGHTS

- We examine when and why extreme leaders are preferred to normative leaders.
- Groups preferred extreme leaders in highly competitive inter-group contexts.
- Preference for extreme leaders is driven by need for inter-group differentiation.
- We show that pro-normative deviance is sometimes more appealing than normativeness.

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### ABSTRACT

Group members typically prefer leaders who have characteristics or attitudes that are in line with group norms (i.e., are normative). In this paper, we explore the possibility that in highly competitive inter-group contexts, group members prefer leaders who can more effectively differentiate the in-group from out-groups, leading to a preference for leaders with more extreme attitudes that are in line with group norms (i.e., pro-normative). In three experiments conducted in an election context in the United States, we find that both Democrats' and Republicans' preference for an extreme leader increases under conditions of high inter-group competition. Results indicate that participants' heightened need to differentiate their political party from the competing party drives this effect, and that this effect is stronger for those who identify strongly with their political party. Implications for group members' responses to in-group deviance and leadership support are discussed.

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### Introduction

From its beginning, polls suggested that the 2012 U.S. Presidential election would be a close race (Borek, 2012). In such competitive electoral contests, political scientists and economists suggest that candidates and parties should move to the center of the ideological spectrum, or “play to the middle,” to attract moderates and centrists (Black, 1948; Downs, 1957). Yet, it seems clear that this strategy was not one that appealed to either party's base during the 2012 U.S. Presidential campaign; rather than moderation, elements within both parties appeared to actively push for extremism from their respective presidential candidates. For example, liberal commentators urged President Obama to more explicitly articulate and champion liberal principles and goals, arguing that he needed to fight harder for progressive priorities (Peoples, 2012). The Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, was similarly criticized by conservatives, who said that he was not conservative enough

(Zengerle, 2012), perhaps leading him to choose a running mate known for ideological extremism (Camia, 2012). These desires could have arguably come at the cost of losing centrist and independent voters. Given the potential cost to such a strategy, we ask, when and why might this preference for leader extremism occur?

In this paper, we suggest that leaders whose attitudes and positions are extreme in the direction of group norms (i.e., pro-normative, henceforth called extreme) can be perceived to more clearly convey the in-group's distinct qualities and values than leaders who are more in line with group norms (i.e., normative, Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000). Thus, extreme leaders may be more appealing to group members when their desire is to differentiate the in-group from relevant out-groups. We explore one context where such inter-group differentiation desires are especially heightened: when inter-group competition is high.

#### *Different types of in-group deviants*

Group norms provide information about behaviors and attitudes that are typical and expected of group members (Cialdini, Reno, &

\* Corresponding author at: Tepper School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, USA.  
E-mail address: [jwchang@cmu.edu](mailto:jwchang@cmu.edu) (J.W. Chang).

Kallgren, 1990; Prentice & Miller, 1996), and serve to establish group identity and distinguish groups from one another (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In general, group members whose attitudes are in line with group norms elicit favorable evaluations, whereas those who do not follow group norms, or deviants, are responded to negatively (Levine, 1989; Marques & Páez, 1994; Turner et al., 1987).

Importantly, not all deviants are the same; the literature has identified different types of in-group deviants based on the direction of their divergence from group norms. Most lay discussions of deviance focus on anti-normative deviants, or those who deviate in a direction away from group norms and towards those of out-groups. However, there also exist pro-normative deviants, who deviate in an extreme direction in line with group norms and away from those of out-groups (Abrams et al., 2000; Morrison & Miller, 2008). The antipathy to deviance that has been documented thus far is reserved for anti-normative deviants. In contrast, pro-normative deviants are generally seen more positively than anti-normative deviants, and sometimes as positively as normative group members (Abrams et al., 2000).

As an example of anti-normative deviants and extreme group members, consider the attitudes of the Republican Party in the United States on the issue of abortion. The average Republican's attitude is pro-life (or anti-abortion), but with conditions, such as when the mother's life is at risk (Kliff, 2012), whereas the average Democrat tends to be pro-choice (Democratic National Platform, 2012). Thus, a pro-choice Republican would be an anti-normative deviant within the Republican Party because his/her attitude diverges from the Republican Party norm and is close to the norm of an out-group, the Democratic Party. In contrast, a Republican who is opposed to abortion under any circumstances would be an extreme group member. And, consistent with prior work on responses to in-group deviants (Abrams et al., 2000; Marques & Páez, 1994), pro-choice Republicans are indeed marginalized within the Republican Party, whereas pro-life extremists are not (Lapidus, 2012).

#### *Group needs and evaluations of in-group deviants*

The findings referenced above, in which extreme group members are seen more positively than anti-normative deviants, are understood to occur because of group members' desire to ensure that their group identity is distinct from those of relevant out-groups (Abrams et al., 2000; Marques & Páez, 1994). That is, anti-normative deviants are evaluated negatively because their attitudes' proximity to out-group norms reduces the clarity of the difference between the in-group identity and that of the out-group. In contrast, extreme members are seen more positively than anti-normative deviants and sometimes as positively as normative members because extreme group members' distance from out-group norms enhance, rather than hinder, the achievement of the goal of in-group distinctiveness.

In this paper, we argue that there are situations in which extreme group members will be celebrated precisely for their difference from out-groups, to the point that they will be preferred even to normative group members. Specifically, we propose that when inter-group differentiation is especially desired by group members, in-group extremists will be seen as more effective at fulfilling such needs, and therefore will be evaluated and responded to more positively than normative members. Our prediction that extremity will be preferred to normativeness runs counter to prior work, which has found that extreme and normative group members are equally accepted by group members (Abrams, de Moura, Marques, & Hutchison, 2008; Abrams et al., 2000). However, the underlying mechanism driving our predicted effects – that group members who successfully fulfill group needs will enjoy greater in-group support – is consistent with research showing that situational concerns can prompt group members to prefer some forms of normativeness over others (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). For example, when situations call for cooperation with an out-group, anti-normative deviants are viewed most positively because their proximity to the out-group is seen as

potentially helpful to the group in achieving its goals (Teixeira, Demoulin, & Yzerbyt, 2011). In the present case, we argue that when the situation calls for inter-group differentiation, extreme group members will be seen as more effective at fulfilling those needs, and therefore responded to more positively, than normative members.

Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) also predicts that group members will sometimes view extreme group members more positively than normative members. Central to this account is the idea that group members are attracted to prototypical in-group members, who are seen as typical and exemplary of the in-group (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner et al., 1987). Thus, in-group extremists will be evaluated positively to the extent that they are perceived to be group prototypical. Importantly, prototypicality is not the same as normativeness; rather, one's group prototypicality is perceived in a given social context and is reflected in the meta-contrast ratio, which is the ratio of the difference between the in-group and out-groups to the differences among in-group members (Turner et al., 1987). Because different situations can shift group members' perceptions of inter- and intra-group differences, the prototypicality of a given group member is not static across all situations. For example, social categorization theory predicts that the existence of a salient out-group will influence group members' perceptions of extreme members such that they are seen as more prototypical, and evaluated more positively, than they would have been if the out-group were not salient (Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1998; Turner et al., 1987).

In contrast to the prototypicality argument offered by self-categorization theory, we propose that there are situations in which extreme group members will be preferred to normative members because of their extremity, and not because of their perceived prototypicality. We argue that when the situation heightens inter-group differentiation goals (Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2003), extreme members will be seen as most effective at fulfilling these goals because they are the most different from the out-group and will therefore be preferred. That is, the preference for extreme group members will occur not because group members' perceptions of the prototypicality of an extreme group member have changed, but because group members will actively seek out extremism.

#### *Inter-group competition and support for extreme leaders*

One context where inter-group differentiation needs are particularly salient is in the presence of heightened inter-group competition; when inter-group competition is high, group members seek to maximize inter-group differences more than when inter-group competition is low or absent (Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2002, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This desire for inter-group differentiation has been shown to manifest itself in a variety of behavioral and attitudinal strategies designed to maximize inter-group differences, including derogation of the out-group (Scheepers et al., 2003), perceiving the in-group to be better than the out-group (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971), and allocating more resources to the in-group than to the out-group (Brewer, 1979).

Group members can also address this increased need for inter-group differentiation through intra-group processes. For example, group members can derogate or reject in-group members who reduce the difference between the in-group and out-groups, such as anti-normative deviants (Marques, Abrams, Páez, & Martínez-Taboada, 1998; Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001). Importantly, as group members' needs to differentiate their group from out-groups increase, so too does the tendency to derogate anti-normative deviants (Jetten, Summerville, Hornsey, & Mewse, 2005; Marques et al., 2001). In a similar way, we focus on in-group support of extreme group members as an avenue that group members can take to address the increased desire for inter-group differentiation, and propose that support for extreme group members will increase as group members' need for inter-group differentiation increases.

Although our discussion to this point has largely centered on group members' evaluation of and response to equal-status peers, we expect

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