

Moral Universalism and the Structure of Ideology

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Throughout the Western world, people's policy views are correlated across domains in a strikingly similar fashion. This paper proposes that what partly explains the structure of ideology is moral universalism: the extent to which people exhibit the same level of altruism and trust towards strangers as towards in-group members. In new large-scale multinational surveys with 15,000 respondents, we measure universalism in both altruism and trust. In the data, heterogeneity in universalism descriptively explains why the left and right both simultaneously support and oppose different types of government spending. Moreover, the left-right divide on topics such as redistribution or foreign aid strongly depends on whether people evaluate more or less universalist implementations of these policies. Large-scale donation data provide complementary field evidence for the political left's universalism.