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Consequences of Politicians' Disrespectful Communication Depend on Social Judgment Dimensions and Voters' Moral Identity

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The present study investigates the consequences of respectful versus disrespectful communication in political debates on voters' social judgments and voting decisions. Reconciling previously mixed results, we argue that the consequences of disrespect vary with the judgment dimension (communion vs. agency) and voters' moral identity. An initial study (N = 197) finds that a political candidate's disrespect towards his or her opponent affects voting decision through voting intention. A second study (N = 327) shows that disrespect influences voting intention through communion but not through agency ratings. Qualifying the previous finding, a third study (N = 329) shows that both communion and agency judgments act as mediators, but in different ways depending on the level of moral identity. Overall, communion judgments played a more prominent part in explaining the consequences of disrespectful communication. Our findings thus present a nuanced picture of respect and disrespect in political communication and shed light on their ramifications.

KEY WORDS: disrespectful communication, social judgment, voting decision, moral identity, negative campaigning

German chancellor Angela Merkel hardly ever raises her voice—even in the face of personal attacks from political opponents or impertinent questions from the press. She smiles and stays calm, as if immune to criticism. For her resolute nature, the staff of the American embassy in Berlin nicknamed her "Teflon-Merkel" (Friedmann, Goetz, Neukirch, Rosenbach, & Stark, 2010). Her challenger in the 2013 German parliament election, Peer Steinbrück, was the exact opposite. He called his colleagues "crybabies" and referred to politicians he did not appreciate as "clowns." Linguists labeled his frank and disrespectful method as "calculated churlishness" (dpa, 2012). However, his way of communicating was not received with unequivocal enthusiasm; in turn, he gave the middle finger to his critics (Denkler, 2013).

The described candidates occupied the extremes of the respect continuum, each considering their behavior an effective way of managing their image. Merkel probably hoped to increase her social attractiveness by behaving respectfully (Schlenker, 1980). Likewise, Steinbrück perhaps acted

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disrespectful to seem assertive and effective (cf. Leary & Kowalsky, 1990). However, German voters drew different conclusions from the politicians' behavior: Merkel was often referred to as integrative, while Steinbrück struck many as clumsy. Yet, Merkel was also labeled as boring and passive, while Steinbrück was seen as quick-witted and competent. Thus, it seems that disrespectful behavior can both help and harm. This interpretative ambiguity is also reflected in the literature: In some cases, voters "punished" politicians for being disrespectful, and in others they judged them as effective (Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007).

With the present article, we aim to shed light on how and when respectful and disrespectful behaviors influence voters' judgments of politicians and their subsequent voting decisions. We argue that the answer lies in voters' judgment process—specifically, how they judge others along the well-established dimensions of communion and agency (or competence and warmth; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Cislak & Wojciszke, 2006, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Communion refers to interpersonal qualities in terms of friendliness or helpfulness, while agency refers to self-related qualities in terms of self-confidence and competitiveness (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). If politicians behave disrespectfully versus respectfully, voters might derive different judgments concerning their communion and agency. We hypothesize that disrespectful behavior might represent a lack of interpersonal quality (communion) while also signaling self-confidence (agency). These judgments should, in consequence, influence voting decisions. However, we also suggest that those judgments depend on voters' relation to morality. As respect is a moral issue, the importance voters personally attach to morality should influence their conclusions drawn from perceived respect and disrespect in terms of communion and agency, altering their voting intention.

Our studies strive to bolster the understanding of how voters process politicians' (dis)respect, thereby expanding previous research in three ways. First, research has mostly relied on candidate ratings *or* voting intentions *or* voting decisions as a dependent variable of disrespectful communication. Instead, we create links between (1) citizens' voting intention and voting decision and (2) their communion and agency judgments of politicians and respective voting intentions. Thus, and second, we identify how voting intentions are affected by the communion and agency judgments derived from perceived (dis)respect in political communication. Finally, we investigate how voters' moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed & Aquino, 2003) influences the communion and agency judgments they derive from politicians' (dis)respect (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). From this, politicians may derive insights regarding how to optimize their self-presentation.

How Politicians' Disrespectful Communication May Affect Voting Intention and Behavior

Political communication research mostly conceptualizes negativity as any kind of criticism towards the opponent (cf. Lau et al., 2007). According to Lau et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis, the breadth of this definition mitigates the overall relationship of negativity to voters' voting intentions and decisions. Thus, in order to foster more useful results, we specifically investigate the consequences of politicians' disrespectful versus respectful negative communication. We speak of disrespectful communication as instances where politicians humiliate their opponents and/or do not take them seriously (Lalljee, Tam, Hewstone, Laham, & Lee, 2009). If, in contrast, politicians communicate respectfully, they consider their opponents' perspectives (Simon, 2007) and recognize them as equal in worth and dignity (Kant, 1785/2012; Pagliaro, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2011). We hypothesize that only politicians who communicate disrespectfully lower their chances of being elected because they violate social standards of conduct and might thus provoke avoidance reactions (cf. Wojciszke, 2005). Supporting this proposition, studies specifying different types of negativity have shown consistent results despite the use of diverse labels: Politicians sending out person-based (Carraro & Castelli, 2010), uncivil (Mutz & Reeves, 2005), and uncivil negative trait-based (Brooks & Geer, 2007)

messages received more negative evaluations and lower voting intention from voters compared to politicians using respectful negative (and positive; Brooks & Geer, 2007) messages.

So far, politicians' disrespectful communication has rarely been linked to actual voting decisions (Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1999); research typically relies on voting intentions, based on good theoretical reasons that link intention with decision (cf. Ajzen, 1991). However, in parliament elections in Germany (as in other countries), voters vote for a party and not the person running for chancellor, so the fit between attitude towards the candidate and voting decision in favor of a party needs investigation. In Study 1, we link a candidate's disrespectful communication and voters' decision in favor of their party via hypothetical voting intention for the candidate. In doing so, we also aim at validating voting intention as a proxy of voting decision for our subsequent studies.

H1: If voters perceive that a politician communicates disrespectfully towards an opponent, they will be less likely to vote for the politician/his/her party.

H2 (mediation): If voters perceive that a politician communicates disrespectfully towards an opponent, they will display lower intention to vote for this politician, and, ultimately, will be less likely to vote for the politician/his/her party.

Social Judgments Drawn from Disrespectful Communication

Voters will be more likely to vote for candidates of whom they hold a positive impression. They draw conclusions concerning the actor's personality attributes based on observed behavior (Jones & Davis, 1965). Thus, politicians' displayed disrespectful communication will flow into voters' impression of them. However, the effect of disrespectful communication may depend on the focal impression dimension. According to social cognition literature, candidates are evaluated along two dimensions: an interpersonal qualities dimension called communion (or warmth) and an efficiency-related dimension called agency (or competence; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Cislak & Wojciszke, 2006, 2008; Fiske et al., 2002). Communion includes attributes such as warm, helpful, or understanding, while agency includes attributes such as independent, self-confident, or competitive, that is, assertiveness and the ability to strive for one's goals (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Both dimensions have been shown to be pervasive of social perception (cf. Brambilla & Leach, 2014): When encountering strangers, people need to quickly decide whether to expect harm or benefits (cf. Wojciszke, 2005). Therefore, they need to judge the nature of people's intentions (communion) and their ability to act on them (agency; cf. Fiske et al., 2007).

On the communion dimension, inferences about a person's traits are more readily drawn from negative information than positive (Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). On the agency dimension, however, positive information is seen as more reliable than negative (Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). As disrespect violates moral standards, it should constitute negative information on the communion dimension. Accordingly, research has shown that observed disrespect decreases politicians' likability (cf. Lau et al., 2007), which is linked to communion judgments (Wojciszke, Abele, & Baryla, 2009).

H3: If voters perceive that a politician communicates disrespectfully, they will judge him/her as less communal.

At the same time, political candidates are expected to be energetic and aggressive (Trent, Trent, Mongeau, & Short-Thompson, 1997). Accordingly, disrespectful communication could be interpreted positively in terms of agency. Identifying this gap, Carraro and Castelli (2010) found that disrespect fostered implicit competence ratings measured by a spontaneous conformity measure. Similarly, there is

evidence of a positive link between (verbal) aggression and perceptions of toughness and coolness (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000) as well as assertiveness and competitiveness (Buss & Perry, 1992).

H4: If voters perceive that a politician communicates disrespectfully, they will judge him/her as more agentic.

Communion and Agency Judgments Linking Disrespect and Voting Intention

Social judgments provide evaluative information that helps individuals deal with their surroundings. People who are judged as high on both dimensions evoke positive emotions and reactions (e.g., admiration or approach), and people low on both dimensions evoke negative emotions and reactions (e.g., pity; Fiske et al., 2002). In line with this, higher communion and agency ratings lead to a more positive attitude toward the politicians in question (Funk, 1996) and a higher intention to vote for them (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2006; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). Support for political candidates should therefore be based on both their communion and agency.

H5 (mediation): Voters base their intention to vote in favor of a politician on both their communion and agency judgments of said politician.

While descriptions of ideal politicians are mostly agency-driven (e.g., qualifications or performance; Funk, 1996), communion judgments are more closely related to global evaluation and voting intentions (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2006). Even though both may play their part, communion judgments usually dominate agency judgments in person evaluation (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008), as the former is considered more indicative of a person's true nature (cf. Ellemers, Pagliaro, & Barreto, 2013). A negative evaluation of communion drawn from observed disrespect should thus dominate a positive agency rating when it comes to voting intention.

H6: Voters base their intention to vote in favor of a politician more strongly on their communion than on their agency judgments of said politician.

The Moderating Role of Voters' Moral Identity

As a social norm, showing respect implies a strong moral component (cf. Kant, 1785/2012). However, whether the link from observed behavior to morality is drawn may depend on the perceiver. Some voters may see disrespectful communication as a reasonable strategy to assert oneself; others may see it as immoral (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). We argue that this depends on how much importance people attach to morality and being a moral person themselves, that is, their moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002). People who consider morality to be an important part of themselves also use morality as a benchmark for others' behavior (Narvaez, Lapsley, Hagele, & Lasky, 2006).

This implies different consequences depending on the judgment dimension. Miller and Schlenker (2011) found that participants high in moral identity judged others low in moral identity as less beneficent and loyal than others high in moral identity. Similarly, we propose that voters with high moral identity will perceive disrespectful communication as less communal, as it violates their moral standards and conflicts with their concept of interpersonal qualities. Voters low in moral identity should not draw equally negative communion ratings from perceived disrespect, as they should not process the

moral failing so strongly. As voters likely base their voting intention on communion judgments, their moral identity should also affect their voting intention in favor of the observed candidate.

H7 (moderation): Voters high in moral identity will draw strongly negative communion judgments from perceived disrespectful communication, while for voters low in moral identity, this relationship will be weakened.
H8 (conditional indirect effect): Due to lower communion ratings, voters high in moral identity will display less intention to vote for a disrespectful candidate compared to voters low in moral identity.

On the agency dimension, however, low moral identity should entail an "anything goes" (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011, p. 309) mindset and thus lead to a more positive evaluation of a politician who communicates disrespectfully. Indeed, participants low in moral identity tend to perceive other people low in moral identity as more successful, insightful, and flexible and thus altogether more capable of pursuing their goals (Miller & Schlenker, 2011). Therefore, we propose that disrespectful communication in the political arena may be seen as an effective strategy to assert oneself and as agentic by voters low in moral identity, while respectful communication could seem less agentic. In contrast, observers high in moral identity should perceive candidates who communicate disrespectfully as less agentic, as they do not see immoral behavior as a legitimate way to act and will generalize the negative information linked to immorality (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). As voters likely base their voting intentions on the candidate's agency, moral identity should also indirectly affect voting intention.

H9 (moderation): Voters low in moral identity will draw positive agency judgments from disrespectful communication, while for voters high in moral identity, this relationship will be weakened (and possibly negative).
H10 (conditional indirect effect): Due to higher agency ratings, voters low in moral identity will display more intention to vote for a disrespectful candidate compared to voters high in moral identity.

Present Research

We present three studies to test our hypotheses. First, we investigated whether voters base their voting intention on a candidate's disrespect in communication via an actual election for the German parliament and chancellorship and how this intention is linked to their actual voting decision. Study 2 followed with an experimental design investigating how a candidate's disrespect in communication affects voters' social judgments and, ultimately, their voting intention. In doing so, we contrasted the consequences of respectful versus disrespectful negative communication. Study 3 extends Study 2 by investigating how voters' moral identity affects their judgments of respectful versus disrespectful candidates. Thereby, we underlined the moral evaluative nature of the psychological process at work. Figure 1 provides an overview of the models tested.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure. Participants were recruited via a professional German panel. About one week before the German parliament election (T1), participants rated the chancellor candidates for

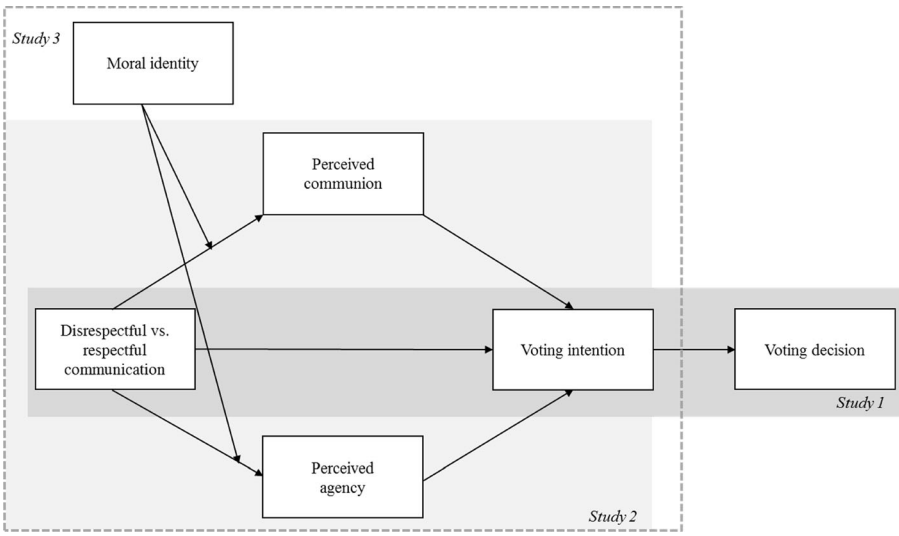


Figure 1. The hypothesized relationships.

the two biggest German parties, Merkel for CDU/CSU and Steinbrück for SPD. During the week after the election (T2), the same participants reported their voting decision.

At T1, 373 participants completed the questionnaire; of these, 267 also participated at T2. We excluded participants who did not report their voting decision or claimed to have cast an invalid ballot, so that 197 participants figured into the analysis, aged between 18 and 85 years ($M = 41.93$, $SD = 15.25$), 49% male. When asked for their voting decision, 32% indicated the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU; 45.3% in the actual election), 20% the Social Democrats (SPD; 29.4%), 5% the Liberals (FDP; 2.4%), 14% the Left Party (8.2%), 6% the Green Party (7.3%), 7% the "Pirates" (2.2%), 7% the "Alternative for Germany" (1.9%), and 9% other parties.

Measures. At T1, participants rated both chancellor candidates (presented in random order) in terms of the respect they usually displayed for political opponents. We used six items developed according to the definition provided above ("recognizes his/her political opponent as equal in worth; attacks his/her political opponent on an issue rather than a person basis; his/her arguments sometimes aim below the belt (r); treats his/her political opponent with respect; does not try to enhance his/her status at the expense of others; uses an appropriate tone in debates"; $\alpha = .85–.90$). Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Participants then indicated whether they would vote for each candidate if they could vote for them directly (5-point Likert scale from 1 = *no* to 5 = *yes*). Afterwards, the level of identification with SPD and CDU was measured by a Venn diagram (Schubert & Otten, 2002), a graphical measure of overlap between the self and a group. This allowed us to control for ingroup and outgroup biases (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Finally, participants reported their age, gender, partisanship, and education (as education is linked to support of negative messages; Lipsitz, Trost, Grossman, & Sides, 2005). At T2, participants reported their voting decision.

Data analysis. From the reported voting decision, we derived two dichotomous variables: voting decision in favor of the CDU (0/1) and in favor of the SPD (0/1). We applied logistic regression analysis to assess the effects of either candidate's disrespect on the corresponding voting decision. Indirect effects through voting intention were calculated using the SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). PROCESS provides estimates for direct and indirect effects using a least square or, as applied here, a logistic regression-based path analytical framework. We used bootstrap confidence intervals to make statistical inferences regarding the indirect effect. In the results, we controlled for participants' gender,

age, strength of party identification, and education. All results also emerged when no controls were used.

Results. Overall, Steinbrück was rated as significantly less respectful ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.79$) than Merkel ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.69$; $t(196) = -6.29$, $p < .001$). The more participants perceived Merkel to be respectful towards her political opponent, the more likely they were to vote for her party, the CDU, $b = 1.35$, $\chi^2 = 42.71$, $p < .001$. In other words, participants were less likely to vote for the CDU the more they evaluated Merkel as disrespectful (H1). Importantly, Merkel's respect was influential beyond participants' pre-existing attitudes in terms of their identification with the CDU. In line with this, participants based their (hypothetical) voting intention for Merkel at T1 on her respect towards the opponent, $b = 1.24$, $t = 10.05$, $p < .001$. Participants' intention to vote for Merkel was closely linked to voting decision in favor of the CDU, $b = 1.23$, $\chi^2 = 87.83$, $p < .001$. The effect of Merkel's respect for the opponent on voting decision was no longer significant when voting intention was included in the regression (Table 1). Thus, Merkel's respect indirectly influenced participants' voting decision in favor of the CDU through their intention to vote for Merkel as a person (H2; indirect effect: $b = 1.61$, BCa CI [0.96, 2.44]).

The same pattern emerged for Steinbrück: The more disrespect that participants perceived on his behalf, the less likely they were to vote for his party, SPD, $b = 0.92$, $\chi^2 = 52.30$, $p < .01$. Higher perceptions of disrespect also led to lower voting intention for him, $b = 0.94$, $t = 8.90$, $p < .001$. Steinbrück's respect was influential beyond participants' pre-existing identification with the SPD. In line with this, participants' intention to vote for Steinbrück at T1 predicted their voting decision for the SPD at T2, $b = 1.21$, $\chi^2 = 83.96$, $p < .001$. The effect of respect on voting decision was no longer significant when voting intention was included in the regression (Table 1). Thus, Steinbrück's disrespect indirectly influenced participants' voting decision in favor of the SPD through their intention to vote for Steinbrück as a person (H2; $b = 1.27$, BCa CI [0.72, 1.89]).

Discussion. A top candidate's disrespectful communication notably decreased voting intention—and subsequently, voting decision—in favor of this candidate. Our model was supported by both our target candidates, strongly suggesting that (1) respect and voting decision are indeed related, and (2) voting intention is an appropriate proxy of voting decisions. However, participants likely had pre-existing attitudes towards both candidates that influenced their ratings of the candidates' communication style and might supersede participants' party identification. While we controlled for this possibility in order to trace the effect back to candidates' respect, we cannot claim a causal relationship between respect and voting based on these data. Therefore, the following two experiments employ fictitious politicians who are not subject to pre-existing attitudes. Additionally, we take a closer look at the roles that social judgment, communion, and agency play in this process.

Pretest for Studies 2 and 3

For the manipulation of disrespect versus respect, we presented participants with statements purportedly used by fictitious politicians when confronting their opponents (cf. Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). In order to select appropriate stimuli, we first constructed a pretest by obtaining statements from political talk shows and a collection of verbal insults in the German parliament (Pursch, 2009). To be identified as disrespectful, a statement had to match the following criteria: It "(a) does not tackle the standpoint or the argumentation of the other party, (b) tries to obtain or enforce support for his own position instead, (c) does so by trying to discredit the other party to the discussion, and (d) does so by representing the other party as unworthy of credibility" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, p. 177). In contrast, respectful expressions point to a lack of information or signal that an argument is understood but not shared sans attacking. Respectful statements imply references to oneself (e.g., "I am" rather than "you are…"), fewer negatively connoted nouns ("I cannot

Table 1. Mediation Analysis Based on Logistic Regression of the Effect of Disrespect in Communication on Voting Decision through Voting Intention (Study 1)

Candidate (Party)		*Model 1*			*Model 2*			*Model 3*		
		b	*OR*	*95% CI*	*b*	*OR*	*95% CI*	*b*	*OR*	*95% CI*
Merkel (CDU)	Age	−0.01	0.99	[0.97, 1.02]	−0.01	1.00	[0.97, 1.02]	0.01	1.01	[0.98, 1.04]
	Gender[a]	−0.05	0.95	[0.49, 1.84]	−0.13	0.88	[0.44, 1.77]	−0.05	0.91	[0.41, 2.20]
	Identification CDU	0.30***	1.35	[1.17, 1.54]	0.26**	1.29	[1.12, 1.50]	0.09	1.09	[0.91, 1.32]
	Education[b]	-.01	.99	[0.85, 1.16]	-.05	0.95	[0.80, 1.13]	−0.04	.79	[0.33, 1.87]
	IV: Respect[c]				1.35***	3.86	[2.08, 7.14]	−0.24	.79	[0.33, 1.87]
	M: Voting intention							1.30***	3.66	[2.29, 5.87]
	Nagelkerke R^2	.15			.29			.52		
	Cox & Snell R^2	.11			.20			.37		
	Model Chi-square	20.75			42.71			88.12		
Steinbrück (SPD)	Age	0.03*	1.03	[1.00, 1.06]	0.02	1.03	[1.00, 1.06]	0.02	1.02	[0.99, 1.05]
	Gender[a]	0.31	1.36	[0.59, 3.15]	0.28	1.32	[0.56, 3.13]	0.10	1.11	[0.41, 3.00]
	Identification SPD	0.55***	1.74	[1.41, 2.15]	0.47***	1.59	[1.28, 1.99]	0.37**	1.45	[1.09, 1.94]
	Education[b]	-.02	0.98	[0.80, 1.20]	0.00	1.00	[0.43, 2.40]	−0.04	0.96	[0.75, 1.23]
	IV: Respect[c]				0.92**	2.52	[1.30, 4.87]	−0.44	0.65	[0.27, 1.58]
	M: Voting intention							1.34***	3.81	[2.19, 6.62]
	Nagelkerke R^2	.33			.38			.57		
	Cox & Snell R^2	.21			.24			.36		
	Model Chi-square	44.00			52.30			84.89		

Note. OR = Odds Ratio, 95% CI = 95% confidence interval limits for Odds Ratio. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, two-sided.

[a]0 = male, 1 = female, [b]0 = lower education, 1 = higher education. [c]Higher values indicate a higher extent of perceived respectful communication.

agree" instead of "idiocy"), less dramatizing ("I see certain risks" rather than "You are leading us to perdition"), and less emotionalizing ("our perspective is different" rather than "that's all lies") (cf. Kuhnert, 2007). Due to limited respectful statements in our first collection, we created a few opposites of the disrespectful statements in order to achieve the same amount of positive and negative statements. In the end, 56 sentences (28 for each category) entered the pretest that was conducted online. The statements were rated by a convenience sample of 58 participants, aged between 23 and 75 years ($M = 42.52$, $SD = 14.07$), 50% male. Participants rated all statements on 11-point scales from −5 (disrespectful) to +5 (respectful), with zero being a neutral point. Ratings were not significantly related to age, gender, or party affiliation. We calculated means and standard deviations for all statements across all participants. Furthermore, we used the overall mean ($M = 5.69$) and standard deviation ($SD = 2.38$) to create cut-off values. For our manipulation, we chose eight statements that were rated as disrespectful ($< M - 1\ SD$) and eight complementary statements that were rated as respectful ($> M + 1\ SD$; see the appendix for all statements). The mean levels of our selected statements significantly differed ($t(14) = -37.20$, $p < .001$), with the mean rating of the final respectful statements being notably higher on our respect scale ($M = 9.42$, $SD = 0.40$) than the mean rating of the disrespectful statements ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.33$).

Study 2

Method

Sample. Participants were recruited via a professional German panel. The study was completed by 381 participants. We excluded participants who were under 18, disagreed on the use of their data,

or whose dataset was incomplete. In the end, 327 participants entered the analysis, aged between 19 and 85 years ($M = 43.22$, $SD = 15.08$), 53% male. Twenty percent reported not to identify with a party at all, 22% supported the SPD, 17% the CDU, 22% the Green Party, 4% the FDP, 5% the Left Party, and 6% the Pirates.

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to a scenario. The experiment followed a one-factor (respectful vs. disrespectful communication) between-subjects design. As men are often more closely associated with agentic traits and women with communal traits, the same behavior could lead to different evaluations (Dolan, 2010). To control for such asymmetries, we randomly varied politician's gender (male vs. female) between participants. Likewise, for control reasons, we randomly varied the party affiliation of the depicted politician (CDU vs. SPD).

Before reading the vignette, participants indicated the strength of their identification with the party of the presented politician by using a Venn diagram (Schubert & Otten, 2002). In the subsequent manipulation, a fictitious politician (male or female) was described as being a party member (of CDU or SPD) for 25 years, a member of the German parliament for 10 years, and an expert on economic issues. He/she was said to have confronted a political opponent in a political talk show by using the eight pretested respectful or disrespectful sentences. As a manipulation check, the politician was rated on three items taken from the respect scale outlined in Study 1 ($\alpha = .87$). Afterwards, participants rated the politician's communion (six items; $\alpha = .93$) and agency (seven items; $\alpha = .83$) using a revision of the Personality Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1978; revision by Ward, Thorn, Clements, Dixon, & Sandford, 2006). Responses were made on a 5-point scale that juxtaposed an adjective at one end with its opposite or negation at the other (e.g., for agency ratings: *He/she... goes to pieces—stands up well under pressure; is not at all—very competitive; is not at all—very self-confident; is not at all—very independent;* for communion ratings: *He/she is... not at all—very aware of others' feelings; very cold—very warm in relations to others; not at all—very kind*). The scale was translated to German following Brislin's (1980) recommendations. Subsequently, participants indicated whether they would intend to vote for the politician if he or she contested a seat in German parliament (5-point Likert scale from 1 = *no* to 5 = *yes*).

We also measured political interest using three items (general interest, consumption of newspapers, consumption of political broadcasts; Vetter, 1997; $\alpha = .74$), because it could alter the reception of the study and influence ratings. Afterwards, participants reported their gender and age, which were used as controls because (1) perceptions of male and female politicians might be influenced by a person's gender (e.g., De Hoogh, Den Hartog, & Nevicka, 2013) and (2) gender and age might not be equally distributed across conditions due to our randomization. Next, participants indicated their education. Finally, participants were asked for permission to use their data, thanked, and debriefed.

Results. We assessed the main effects with multiple regression analysis and used PROCESS for mediation analysis. For dichotomous predictors, we report unstandardized coefficients (Hayes, 2013). All reported results also held when we controlled for the participants' gender, age, political interest, strength of party identification, and education, as well as the gender and party of the presented politician.

According to the manipulation check, participants rated politicians in the disrespect condition as significantly less respectful ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.92$) than politicians in the respect condition ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.81$; $t(327) = 15.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .41$). Participants' agency and communion judgments of the candidates were moderately correlated, $r = .33$, $p < .01$. Participants judged respectful candidates as more communal ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.72$) than disrespectful candidates ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.72$), $b = 1.16$, $t(327) = 13.50$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .36$ (H3). However, they did not provide different agency judgments for respectful ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.74$) versus disrespectful candidates ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.78$), $b = -0.03$, $t(327) = -0.37$, $p > .71$, contradicting Hypothesis 4. Additionally, participants were more willing to vote for respectful candidates ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.17$) than for disrespectful candidates ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.01$), $b = 0.67$, $t(327) = 5.46$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .08$; their voting intention

Table 2. Mediation Analysis of the Effect of Disrespect in Communication on Voting Intention through Social Judgment (Study 2)

	Model 1		*Model 2*		*Model 3*		*Model 4*		*Model 5*	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
IV: Respect[a]	0.67***	.12	−0.40**	.12	0.69***	.11	−0.22	.12	−0.15	.12
M_1: Communion			0.90***	.06	-	-	0.78***	.07	0.72***	.07
M_2: Agency					0.65***	.07	0.30***	.07	0.35***	.07
Participants' gender[b]									−0.03	.10
Participants' age									0.00	0.00
Participants' political interest									−0.06	.07
Participants' strength of party identification									0.09***	.02
Participants' education									0.02	.02
Politician's gender[b]									0.07	.10
Politician's party[c]									0.20*	.10

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$, two-sided; [a]0 = disrespectful communication, 1 = respectful communication; [b]0 = male, 1 = female; [c]0 = CDU, 1 = SPD.

in favor of a candidate was based on both their communion ($\beta = .58$, $t(326) = 13.74$, $p < .001$) and agency judgments ($\beta = .22$, $t(326) = 5.21$, $p < .001$; overall $R^2 = .48$).

When considering both communion and agency judgments as mediators, the candidate's respect no longer significantly explained participants' voting intention (Table 2), indicating an indirect effect. This indirect effect, however, was completely determined by communion judgments, $b = 0.90$, BCa CI [0.71, 1.12], while there was no indirect effect via agency, $b = -0.01$, BCa CI [−0.06, 0.04]. Thus, our Hypothesis 5 was only partly met. In line with Hypothesis 6, participants' communion judgments significantly better explained how a candidate's respect versus disrespect affected participants' voting intention compared to agency judgments (contrast: $b = .91$, BCa CI [0.72, 1.11]).

Discussion. Our finding from Study 1, that voters are less willing to vote for a disrespectful candidate, was replicated with a different design in Study 2. The present study allowed us to delineate that this effect was a consequence of participants' lower communion ratings. In contrast, candidates' displayed disrespect did not affect participants' agency ratings of them. Seemingly, politicians need more than attacks in order to convince voters of their agency. However, as the nonsignificant results also showed, attacks did not *harm* one's image in terms of being agentic. Moreover, participants' agency judgments still played a role in their voting intention.

The slightly unexpected pattern raises the question of whether voters of various mindsets differently "translate" respectful or disrespectful communication into social judgments. Thus, the effect might be overall neutralized. As respect and disrespect imply a strongly moral component (Kant, 1785/2012), the importance that voters attach to morality may play a role in the perception of disrespect as agentic. Therefore, we focus on voters' moral identity in Study 3.

Study 3

Method

Sample and design. The sample was recruited through the online recruiting platform of a German distance university and additionally on social network platforms. The study was completed by 366 participants. We excluded all participants who were under 18, disagreed with the use of their data, or whose datasets were incomplete. In the end, 329 participants entered the analysis, aged

between 18 and 71 years ($M = 32.26$, $SD = 11.05$), 66% female. About a third (36%) supported the Green Party, 18% the SPD, 5% the Left Party, 3% the Pirates, 12% the CDU, and 3% the FDP, and 18% did not support any particular party.

Procedure. We used the same procedure as described in Study 2 (communion judgments: $\alpha = .93$; agency judgments: $\alpha = .77$). Additionally, we measured participants' moral identity at the end of the questionnaire using the shortened Self-Importance of Moral Identity Scale by Aquino and colleagues (2009; five items; Aquino & Reed, 2002). The introduction of this scale asks participants to imagine a person who has many moral characteristics (e.g., *caring, compassionate, friendly*). Afterwards, they indicate the extent to which they would like to be such a person (e.g., *"I strongly desire to have these characteristics"*; *"Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am"*). Answers are made on 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .66$). As before, the scale was translated into German (Brislin, 1980).

Results. We used PROCESS to analyze indirect and conditional indirect effects. For the latter, PROCESS provides indirect effects on different levels of the moderator (Hayes, 2013). We centered continuous moderator and continuous control variables before entering them into the moderation analysis. All results held when we controlled for participants' gender, age, political interest, strength of party identification, and education, as well as the politicians' gender and party affiliation.

The manipulation check showed that participants rated the politician in the respect condition as significantly more respectful ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.85$) than the politician in the disrespect condition ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.69$), $t(327) = 19.96$, $p < .001$. Participants also judged the respectful politician as significantly more communal than the disrespectful politician, $b = 1.37$, $t(327) = 18.66$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .51$. They did not base their agency judgments on the politician's respect, $b = -0.10$, $t(327) = -1.46$, $p = .14$, $R^2 = .003$. Participants' communion and agency judgments of the politician were not correlated. Echoing Study 2, participants' voting intention in favor of the politician was indirectly affected by the politician's disrespectful communication through their communion judgments, $b = 0.65$, BCa CI [0.44, 0.87], while no such effect occurred through agency judgments, $b = -0.03$, BCa CI [−0.09, 0.01]. As Table 3 shows, participants' moral identity significantly altered the communion judgments they derived from politicians' disrespectful versus respectful communication, $b = .35$, $t(319) = 2.72$, $p < .01$.

In support of Hypothesis 7, simple slope analysis revealed that participants high in moral identity judged the respectful politician as more communal than the disrespectful politician ($b = 1.56$, $t(319) = 20.76$, $p < .001$), while this disparity was weaker for participants low in moral identity ($b = 1.17$, $t(319) = 15.31$, $p < .001$; cf. Figure 2). The difference between the slopes was significant ($t(316) = 3.29$, $p < .01$). Taking the proposed conditional indirect effect into account, we tested for indirect effects of the politician's respect on participants' voting intention through their communion judgments at different levels of moral identity ($M \pm 1$ *SD*; Table 4). All indirect effects differed from zero, becoming weaker with lower levels of moral identity (H8).

Participants' moral identity only marginally altered the agency judgments drawn from perceived respect versus disrespect (interaction effect: $b = .23$, $t(319) = 1.78$, $p < .08$). Simple slope analysis showed that participants low in moral identity judged the respectful politician to be significantly less agentic than the disrespectful politician ($b = -0.23$, $t(319) = -2.67$, $p < .01$). In contrast, participants high in moral identity provided about the same agency ratings for respectful and disrespectful politicians ($b = 0.03$, $t(319) = 0.32$, $p > .75$; Figure 3). The difference between the slopes was significant ($t(316) = 2.00$, $p < .05$), but only marginally significant when we accounted for our control variables ($p < .10$). We thus consider Hypothesis 9 to be supported, albeit weakly. By analyzing the conditional indirect effect, we found a negative (though small) indirect effect of disrespect on voting intention through agency for participants low in moral identity (−1 *SD*). The indirect effects were not significant for participants at higher levels of moral identity, thus partly supporting Hypothesis 10.

Table 3. Moderated Mediation Analysis of the Effect of Disrespect in Communication on Voting Intention through Social Judgment Moderated by Moral Identity (Study 3)

	Communion			*Agency*			*Voting Intention*		
Predictor	*Value*	*b*	*SE*	*Value*	*b*	*SE*	*Value*	*b*	*SE*
Politician's gender[a]		0.12†	.07		0.18*	.07		0.22*	.09
Politician's party[b]		0.13†	.08		−0.05	.08		0.38***	.10
Participants' age		−0.01	.00		−0.01**	.00		0.00	.01
Participants' gender[a]		−0.04	.08		−0.04	.08		0.12	.10
Party identification		0.04†	.02		−0.01	.02		0.18***	.03
Political interest		−0.07	.05		0.05	.05		−0.16	.06
Education		0.05†	.03		0.01	.03		.04	.04
R^2 after Step 1	.07			.06			.28		
Respect[c]		1.34***	.07		−0.12†	.07		0.15	.13
Moral identity		−0.13	.09		−0.02	.09		−0.07	.12
R^2 after Step 2	.56			.07			.38		
Respect*moral identity		0.35**	.13		0.22†	.13		0.16	.17
R^2 after Step 3	.57			.08			.39		
Communion								0.45***	.07
Agency								0.29***	.07
R^2 after Step 4							.48		

Note. Final model results reported. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, two-sided; [a]0 = male, 1 = female; [b]0 = CDU, 1 = SPD; [c]0 = disrespectful communication, 1 = respectful communication.

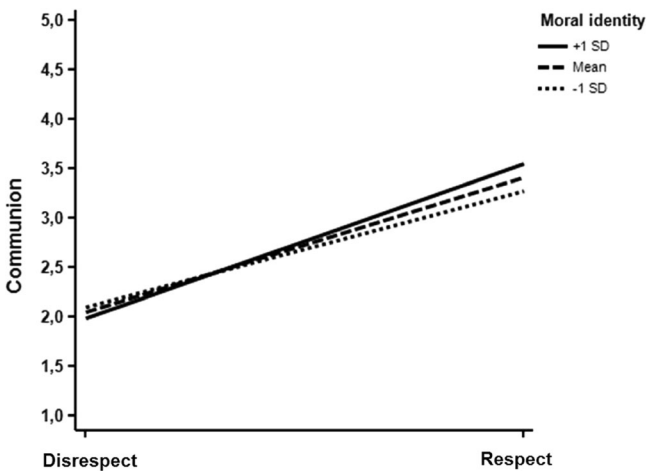


Figure 2. Effect of disrespect in communication on communion ratings at different levels of moral identity.

Additional analysis of the crossed simple slopes indicated that participants' moral identity did not alter their communion ratings when the politician communicated disrespectfully (interaction effect: $b = -0.10$, $t(319) = -1.15$, $p > .25$), but it did when the politician communicated respectfully ($b = 0.24$, $t(319) = 2.72$, $p < .01$). In other words, participants high in moral identity rated respectful communication as more communal than participants low in moral identity, while their communion ratings for disrespect did not differ. The same pattern emerged for agency ratings: Participants low in moral identity rated respectful behavior as significantly less agentic than participants high in moral identity ($b = .22$, $t(319)$, $p < .02$), while their agency ratings for disrespect did not differ ($b = -0.01$, $t(319) = -0.11$, $p > .92$).

Table 4. Conditional Indirect Effect of Disrespect in Communication[a] on Voting Intention through Social Judgment at Different Values of Moral Identity in Study 3

	Communion			*Agency*		
Value of moral identity	*Effect*	*Boot SE*	*95% CI*	*Effect*	*Boot SE*	*95% CI*
−.56 (−1 SD)	0.56	.10	[0.38, 0.78]	−0.07	.03	[-0.15, −0.02]
0 (M)	0.65	.11	[0.44, 0.87]	−0.03	.02	[-0.09, 0.01]
.56 (+ 1 SD)	0.74	.13	[0.50, 1.01]	0.01	.03	[-0.06, 0.06]

Note. Number of bootstrap samples = 20.000. CI = confidence interval limits for the indirect effect. [a]0 = disrespectful communication, 1 = respectful communication.

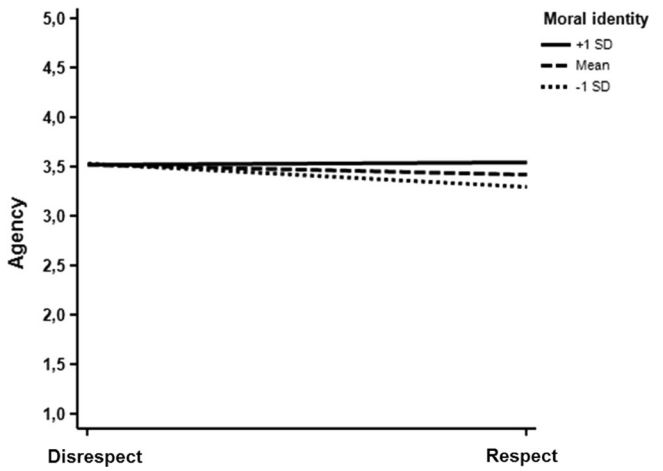


Figure 3. Effect of disrespect in communication on agency ratings at different levels of moral identity.

Discussion. Study 3 replicated our overall finding that voters are less willing to vote for a disrespectful candidate due to decreased communion ratings. Compared to participants low in moral identity, participants high in moral identity showed greater increases in communion ratings in the face of respectful communication, as well as indicated higher voting intention in favor of the candidate. This supports the notion that respectful communication implies a moral component and that this component influences judgments drawn from perceived respect. Even if, overall, participants' agency ratings did not explain the relationship between politicians' disrespect and participants' voting intention, participants low in moral identity perceived respectful communication as less agentic and, through that, showed lower voting intention in favor of a respectful candidate.

General Discussion

Overall, disrespect in politicians' communication turned out to be a relevant factor for participants' decision-making, independent of party identification. Participants were less willing to vote for a disrespectful candidate and less likely to actually vote for his/her party. Even though pre-existing attitudes may have played an important part in the relationship between participants' ratings of candidates' respect and their voting decision in Study 1, the subsequent experiments provided support for the causal direction. Participants provided lower communion judgments for politicians who communicated disrespectfully which was congruent with existing findings (cf. Brooks & Geer, 2007; Fridkin &

Kenney, 2011; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Politicians thus damage themselves on the interpersonal level by communicating disrespectfully and thereby cause a decrease in voting intention and decision.

As our studies did not initially show a decrease in agency ratings, any overall backlash effects of disrespectful behavior likely result from lower communion rather than agency judgments. Due to its interpersonal nature, communication seems more closely linked to communion than to agency judgments. However, political communication is also strategically about portraying competence. Indeed, studies show that politicians' communication can affect voters' agency judgments (e.g., Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). In Study 3, our own results can be interpreted in that direction, too, even if only for participants low in moral identity. Moreover, throughout all studies, participants consistently based their voting intention on both their communion and agency ratings. Thus, high agency ratings might shield politicians from the negative effects of disrespectful communication to some extent. Furthermore, we found that participants low in moral identity provide higher agency ratings for disrespectful than respectful candidates. Future studies should investigate whether agency ratings actively influence the relationship between disrespect in communication and voting under certain circumstances. For example, we would speculate that in times of crisis or conflict, when action orientation is needed, voters might seek politicians who are very self-confident, assertive, and active, and simultaneously be more forgiving of interpersonal weaknesses.

As our moderation design indicates (cf. Jacoby & Sassenberg, 2011), morality is generally useful for understanding the "when" and "how" of backlash effects. Not only can backlash result from socially condemned communication, but there is the possible threat of being "too moral," at least for voters low in moral identity. On this note, future research may want to investigate potential curvilinear effects—that is, whether voting in favor of a candidate is stimulated by a mean level of respectful communication but constrained by too little or too much respectful communication.

Recently, researchers have argued that the communion dimension should be subdivided into the two dimensions of sociability and morality (cf. Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007), with morality providing the most diagnostic information on others. While our communion measure mainly taps the sociability subdimension, future research should also consider morality as a judgment dimension. Respectful behavior has strong moral implications and should thus be diagnostic of a politician's perceived morality, thereby influencing voting intention. Additionally, moral identity should determine the standards applied to others' behavior and thus be particularly important when evaluating others' morality (cf. Narvaez et al., 2006).

An interesting side finding is that participants provided fairly consistent ratings of the disrespectful candidate, regardless of high or low moral identity. Instead, the respectful candidate received very different judgments depending on voters' moral identity. Hence, participants' moral identity did indeed affect their perception of politicians' communication, but in a way contrary to what we expected. This creates new research opportunities. For instance, disrespect could be perceived as the norm in political contests, such that the consequential novelty of respectful communication elicits the aforementioned effects.

Conclusion

What can politicians deduce from our work? As our data show, disrespectful communication creates a large potential for backlash. Thus, this type of communication should generally be avoided—despite what political advisors may suggest for the big TV show battles (cf. Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). However, being "extremely" respectful is not necessarily a magic bullet. On the contrary, such behavior might lower agency ratings from voters who do not greatly emphasize morality in their self-definitions. In front of audiences expected to be low in moral identity, presenting oneself as more disrespectful might be more effective—but then again, in an age of smartphone cameras and YouTube,

such displays may resurface elsewhere and potentially disrupt a far larger voting population. All in all, our data reflect that politicians would be wiser to risk a nickname like "Teflon-Merkel" than to hope churlishness can be spun into charm.

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Appendix

Statements for the Disrespect in Communication Manipulation (translated from German: means and standard deviations refer to the 11-point scale respect ratings in the pretest)

Disrespectful communication	*M*	*SD*
You haven't the faintest idea of what you're doing.	2.45	1.49
If you knew your stuff a little better, you would not talk in such a stupid way.	2.17	1.55
This is nothing but hypocrisy. There's no other name for that.	2.52	1.49
Don't you lie to the people.	2.64	1.61
This sounds just like another chapter of your book 'How to trick the people'.	2.62	1.62
At this point, you failed miserably.	3.31	2.04
You'll never ever have the backbone to accomplish that.	2.50	1.63
Prior to blaming others, you should get your own homework done first.	2.81	1.47
Respectful communication	*M*	*SD*
I can see your point, but still I disagree.	9.90	1.25
I don't completely understand your point of view.	8.93	1.68
I need some more information in order to be really able to follow you.	9.17	1.71
I would just like to draw your attention to the risks, for we will all have to bear the consequences.	9.21	1.61
I do not doubt that your intentions are good. But I think it is important to consider all possible consequences.	9.26	1.49
Please briefly give your reasons for this, so I can understand you better.	10.03	1.21
Of course, it is quite tempting to approach this topic in this way. But I do not want to disregard some objections.	9.19	1.59
I listened to your point, and now I ask you to listen to mine	9.69	1.56