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Donald Trump and the rationalization of transgressive behavior: The role of group prototypicality and identity advancement

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Abstract

Transgressive leadership, especially in politics, can have significant consequences for groups and communities. However, research suggests that transgressive leaders are often granted deviance credit, and regarded sympathetically by followers due to perceptions of the leader's group prototypicality and identity advancement. We extend previous work by examining whether these perceptions additionally play a role in rationalizing the transgressions of a leader and whether deviance credit persists after a leader exits their leadership position. The present three-wave longitudinal study ($N = 200$) addresses these questions using the applied context of the 2020 US Presidential election. Across three survey waves administered during and after Donald Trump's election loss, Republicans perceived three transgressive behaviors (sharing false information, nepotism, and abuse of power) as less unethical when committed by Donald Trump than when the same behaviors are viewed in isolation. Perceptions of Trump's identity advancement, but not his group prototypicality, predicted the extent to which Republicans downplayed the unethicalness of his transgressions. Decreases in identity advancement across time were also related to increases in perceptions of Trump's unethicalness. Implications for the social identity theory of leadership, subjective group dynamics, and the broader consequences of deviance credit to transgressive leaders are discussed.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Transgressive leadership poses serious legal, economic, and social issues for a wide variety of groups. This is especially the case in political contexts, where transgressive leadership has the potential to provoke widespread disorder and produce deep divisions between groups and communities. Despite these serious consequences, transgressive leaders are often able to maintain support from their in-group and escape serious breaches of laws relatively unscathed. The Presidency of Donald Trump illustrates this point. Despite his

numerous transgressions, Donald Trump was able to secure more than 74 million votes in the 2020 US election and survive two historic impeachment trials without a guilty verdict. The ramifications of Donald Trump's actions have been substantial, culminating in the January 6th US Capitol riots where pro-Trump supporters attempted to overturn the results of a democratic election. At its worst, transgressive leadership threatens the social fabric of entire countries. It is, therefore, a crucial societal imperative to understand why and when followers continue to support transgressive political leaders such as Donald Trump.¹

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Transgressive leadership is typically defined as the violation of social, moral, or legal norms (Abrams et al., 2013). Transgressive leadership often falls under the broader category of unethical leadership (Brown & Mitchell, 2010), which includes other negative leadership phenomenon such as toxic (Webster et al., 2014) or destructive (Thoroughgood et al., 2012) leadership. We draw a distinction between transgressive and unethical leadership in that the former constitutes a clear breach of an expected norm, whereas the latter constitutes a subjective perception that a leader is unethical (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Consequently, we examine whether perceptions of a leader's unethicalness (subjective evaluation) may be downplayed as a method of rationalizing a leader's transgressive behavior.

Previous experimental social psychological research has established that transgressive leaders are typically treated leniently by their followers (Abrams et al., 2013). This body of literature also identified several mechanisms that could underpin this leniency, such as the leader's perceived group prototypicality (Hogg, 2001; Hogg et al., 2012) and their advancement of the group's interests (Abrams et al., 2013, Study 5; Steffens et al., 2014). However, there are currently two unexplored avenues in this existing research. First, the existing literature only considers how social psychological processes influence the endorsement of transgressive leaders. It is unclear whether followers first rationalize their leader's behavior in a manner that enables continued support for them, and to what extent perceptions of group prototypicality and identity advancement play a role in this. Second, prior research has only considered this leniency in the context of current leaders. It is unclear whether these processes will continue to operate following a leader's exit from their leadership position. Specifically, it is unclear whether people will continue to rationalize the transgressive behavior of ex-leaders and to what extent group prototypicality and identity advancement may continue to provide protective effects. The present research addresses these issues and provides an important extension of previous deviance credit research by exploring both the role of identity advancement and by considering whether rationalizing a leader's behavior as less unethical may form an alternative mechanism underpinning the support of transgressive leaders.

Donald Trump's defeat in the 2020 US presidential election, and his transgressive conduct during his presidency, offer a suitable opportunity to explore these questions within an applied context. Much of the extant research on transgressive leadership has utilized artificial or hypothetical scenarios, and there is a strong need to assess whether effects from laboratory experiments replicate in cases of real leadership. In this article, we seek to address three specific questions using the applied context of Donald Trump's presidency: (1) Will in-group members (i.e., Republicans) downplay the perceived unethicalness of their leader's transgressive conduct? (2) Will previously established social identity mechanisms, namely, group prototypicality and identity advancement, influence the extent to which in-group members downplay the perceived unethicalness of their leader's behavior? (3) Will in-group members be inclined to view their leader as less prototypical and group orientated, and their

behavior as more unethical, following their exit as leader? Exploring these questions in an applied and longitudinal context provides an important contribution to understanding how social psychological processes operate in real instances of transgressive leadership.

1.1 | Subjective group dynamics, leadership, and deviance credit

The social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) outlines how group members typically prefer homogeneous groups that abide by normative standards (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Group members who deviate from the group's normative values threaten this homogeneity and normative consensus (Scheepers et al., 2002; Wellen & Neal, 2006). Extending social identity theory, subjective group dynamics theory (Marques et al., 1998; Marques et al., 2001) holds that in-group deviants are especially likely to be derogated (relative to normative in-group members and to out-group deviants), resulting in the black sheep effect (Marques & Paez, 1994). The effect is particularly strong if the deviant is a central member of the group (Pinto et al., 2010). The derogation of deviants serves to both reinforce the normative behavior of the group and isolate the deviant from the remainder of the group (Eidelman et al., 2006). In this way, the subjective validity of the in-group's values is protected, and normative consensus and intergroup distinctiveness is maintained.

In-group deviant leaders, on the other hand, are often spared the same harsh derogation directed towards deviant members. Across five studies, Abrams et al. (2013) demonstrate transgression credit; the tendency for in-group leaders to be evaluated more positively following their transgressions than in-group members and out-group leaders and members. An extension of transgression credit, deviance credit (Abrams et al., 2018), identifies two pathways that underlie this leniency for in-group leaders: the accrual of group prototypicality and the conferral of a right to lead. A large body of research has established that leaders who are group prototypical (i.e., embody the norms and values of the group prototype) receive more endorsement as leaders (Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Fielding & Hogg, 1997; Hains et al., 1997; Steffens et al., 2021; van Knippenberg, 2011). Indeed, perceiving a leader as unrepresentative would indicate a negative evaluation of the wider group. Leaders also occupy a position of status within the group and therefore may be conferred an inherent right to act as they please as a result of their de facto leadership status. Such deference of a right to lead acts as an import expression of group loyalty (Zdaniuk & Levine, 2001). In the context of transgression, Abrams et al. (2018) note that leaders produce a dilemma for followers because they must choose between upholding the normative values of the group, continuing to perceive their leader as group prototypical, and conferring loyalty to the group and its leader through unwavering support. Responding less critically to a leader's transgression offers a way to resolve this dilemma.

An important caveat to deviance credit is that leaders must be viewed as transgressing in the name of the group to receive lenient

evaluations. Abrams et al. (2013, Study 5) find that leaders who transgress for self-serving reasons are derogated much as a normal group member would be. Only leaders who serve the group in their transgression receive transgression credit. Indeed, identity advancement is a key component of identity leadership (Steffens et al., 2014) and, as well as being perceived as prototypical of the group, leaders must be seen as acting for the group to receive support (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). Ultimately, transgressive leaders must be viewed by their followers as advancing the interests of their group to be granted lenient treatment for their transgressive behavior.

1.2 | Rationalizing transgressive behavior

The literature on deviance credit outlines how group prototypicality and identity advancement contribute to the lenient evaluations for transgressive leaders. However, what is unclear is how people manage the likely cognitive dissonance that arises as a result of their leader's transgressive actions. Festinger's (1957) theory suggests that cognitive dissonance is experienced as an unpleasant feeling arising from the inconsistency between attitudes and behavior, which individuals are motivated to resolve. There are several methods of reducing dissonance (McGrath, 2017), but the relative ease of changing attitudes means that this is typically achieved by altering one's attitude to be in line with their behavior (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007).

In group settings, it is also possible to experience vicarious cognitive dissonance over the counter-attitudinal behavior of another group member (Cooper & Hogg, 2007). Rather than expel deviants, as in the black sheep effect (Marques & Paez, 1994), an alternative way to resolve this vicarious cognitive dissonance is to rationalize the deviant's behavior (Norton et al., 2003). Such rationalization can result in the bolstering of the in-group deviant and their counter-attitudinal position (Focella et al., 2016). Otten and Gordijn (2014) note that one particular method that groups utilize in rationalizing the behavior of deviant members is to downplay the severity of their behavior. Consequently, in the case of transgressive leaders, we expect that group members may resolve any vicarious cognitive dissonance by downplaying the perceived unethicalness of their leader's behavior, which enables continued support for the leader.

H1: *Republicans will downplay the perceived unethicalness of Donald Trump's transgressions. Specifically, transgressive behaviors will be evaluated as less unethical when committed by Donald Trump than when the same behaviors are evaluated in isolation.*

Research by Morton et al. (2007) suggests that such downplaying or acceptance of a leader's deviance may be strategic. Specifically, Morton et al. found that deviant political leaders were more likely to be endorsed by in-group members if they believed their deviant position would secure more votes for their party. Similarly, Aguiar et al. (2017) found that effective in-group deviants who

secure in-group gains receive less derogation than ineffective deviants. Morais and de Moura (2018) also found that unethical leaders received more support if they secured profits for the in-group. Overall, group members appear willing to overlook a leader's transgressive behavior for in-group gains. Whilst this body of research has typically focused on endorsement rather than perceptions of unethicalness, we expect that perceiving a leader as advancing the group's identity may similarly allow group members to more easily downplay their leader's transgressive behavior as less unethical.

In a similar vein, the need to uphold the prototypicality of a group leader may also lead group members to strategically downplay their transgressive behavior. In line with transgression credit and subjective group dynamics, viewing a leader as highly prototypical may induce a greater need to protect the in-group's positive validity and resolve the dilemma that transgressive leaders produce. Viewing a leader as unrepresentative of the group likely undermines the legitimacy and validity of the in-group's values (Abrams et al., 2018). Therefore, followers may be motivated to uphold perceptions of their leader's group prototypicality, and be unwilling to derogate them, to avoid damaging the group's subjective validity. Indeed, Ramdass and Hogg (2019) found that in-group cheaters who were prototypical were spared from derogation relative to non-prototypical cheaters. Followers who perceive their leader as group prototypical may therefore be more inclined to downplay their leader's transgressions as a way of evading acceptance that their leader is non-prototypical of the group, which consequently minimizes the threat the leader represents to the group's subjective validity. As with identity advancement, group members may consequently be more inclined to downplay the behavior of more prototypical leaders.

H2: *Identity advancement and group prototypicality will predict the extent to which Republicans downplay the perceived unethicalness of Donald Trump's transgressions.*

1.3 | Changes in leadership

Current research only considers how these processes of group prototypicality and identity advancement operate for current leaders. However, research from Abrams et al. (2008) indicates that ex-leaders lose their license to deviate and are treated in a similar manner to ordinary members. Indeed, given that the downplaying or acceptance of a leader's deviance may be strategic, Morton (2010) notes that if such endorsement of a deviant fails to bring success to the group there may be a quick reversal to the usual derogation and unwillingness to justify their behavior. This is especially likely following an in-group loss by the leader, such as an election loss. For example, Morais et al. (2020) conducted research in the context of the 2016 US Presidential election and found that Democrats viewed unethical leadership behavior as more unacceptable following the election loss of Hillary Clinton. Therefore, we expect that

following Donald Trump's election loss and exit as US President, Republicans may be less inclined to downplay his behavior as less unethical.

H3: *Republicans will evaluate Donald Trump's behavior as more unethical after his exit from the Presidency than they evaluate his behavior whilst he is still President.*

In a similar manner, group members' perceptions of their leader's group prototypicality and identity advancement may also change following their leader's exit. For example, Gaffney et al. (2019) found that Republican's perceptions of Donald Trump's prototypicality increased following his election win in 2016. It seems reasonable to assume that the counterfactual may also be true; that following an election loss, Republicans may view Trump as less representative. Likewise, leaders are typically assumed to hold a stronger motivation for serving the interests of the group than ordinary members are (Hogg et al., 2012). Assuming ex-leaders are treated much the same as typical group members (Abrams et al., 2008), it is expected that followers may view a leader as advancing the group's identity less following their exit from their leadership position. This is especially likely when the exit is as a result of the leader's election loss, which confirms the leader's failure to advance in-group interests.

H4: *Republicans will perceive Donald Trump as less group prototypical and less identity advancing following his exit from the Presidency than they perceive him whilst he is still President.*

Given that we expect perceptions of Donald Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement to drop after his exit as President, and perceptions of his unethicalness to increase, we additionally expect a negative correlation between these constructs over time. Specifically, Republicans who view Donald Trump as less group prototypical and less identity advancing from pre to post exit should concomitantly view his behavior as more unethical. A negative correlation between these measures over time would indicate a weakening of the protective effects of identity advancement and group prototypicality in the downplaying of transgressive leadership behaviors.

H5: *Group prototypicality and identity advancement will have a negative longitudinal correlation with perceptions of unethicalness such that participants who view Donald Trump as less prototypical and less group serving over time will view his behavior as more unethical.*

1.4 | Overview

To assess the proposed hypotheses, we conducted a longitudinal survey study of Republicans throughout the 2020 US election period. Split across three waves, we assess Republicans' perceptions of Donald Trump's group prototypicality, identity advancement, and

unethicalness for engaging in three transgressive behaviors: sharing false information, nepotism, and abuse of power. We selected these specific behaviors because they concerned highly salient breaches of laws or rules committed by Donald Trump that did not violate any moral taboo subjects, which would likely influence perceptions (Abrams et al., 2014). Waves were split so that the first two waves were conducted before the 2020 election (and whilst Donald Trump was still President) and the third wave after the inauguration of Joe Biden (and when Donald Trump was officially no longer President). The main hypotheses of this study were preregistered at <https://aspredicted.org>. The hypotheses were preregistered across two separate preregistrations. Specifically, the hypotheses for Waves 1 and 2 were preregistered at <https://aspredicted.org/jz99z.pdf> and the hypotheses for Wave 3 was preregistered at <https://aspredicted.org/5du33.pdf>. Given the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the US 2020 Election, it was not feasible to register all hypotheses under one preregistration. Indeed, had Donald Trump won the election the shape of this paper and hypotheses would have been different. We thus waited until the outcome of the election to preregister hypotheses pertaining to Wave 3. The anonymized data and coding scripts are also accessible at https://osf.io/h2u9k/?view_only=0955a203d12b4780acef0022002a0b3e.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Participants

At Wave 1, a total of 200 Republicans were recruited from the crowdsourcing platform Prolific Academic ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.62$, standard deviation $[SD]_{\text{age}} = 11.70$, 109 males, 90 females, and one participant who identified as other). Participants were paid \$0.93 for 8 min of their time at Wave 1. At Wave 2, we retained 175 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.14$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.12$, 96 males and 78 females), an attrition rate of 12.5% over a period of two days. For Wave 2, participants were paid \$0.69 for 6 min of their time. At Wave 3, we retained 102 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 40.51$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.12$, 57 males and 45 females), an attrition rate of 41.7% over a period of two months. Participants were paid \$1.87 for 15 min of their time at Wave 3. Sensitivity power analysis indicated that the sample size of 102 participants with 80% power was sufficient to detect effect sizes of $f^2 = 0.14$ for repeated-measures analysis of variances (ANOVAs) (Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4), $f^2 = 0.06$ for regression coefficients in a linear regression model with three predictors (Hypothesis 2), and $r = .27$ for bivariate correlations (Hypothesis 5).

2.2 | Design

We employed a longitudinal design and administered surveys to participants across three waves. Wave 1 occurred on October 27, 2020, 1 week before the 2020 US Presidential Election, with Wave 2 occurring 2 days after Wave 1. Conducting both waves close to

the election ensured that both the intergroup context and the conduct of Donald Trump would be naturally salient among participants. Given that both our dependent and independent variables for hypothesis two were measured constructs, common method bias may have inflated the relationships between our constructs if measured at the same time point (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Following guidelines from Podsakoff et al. (2003), we, therefore, opted to obtain our independent measures in Wave 1 and our dependent measures in Wave 2 to minimize the threat of common method bias. Given the volatile nature of the 2020 US Presidential Election, we reasoned that a 2-day time gap would balance the need to minimize common method bias whilst avoiding external events in the election from confounding our results. Wave 3 occurred approximately 2 months later, being administered on January 21, 2021, 1 day after President Joe Biden's inauguration. Thus, Waves 1 and 2 occurred whilst President Donald Trump still held his leadership position as US President and Wave 3 occurred after Donald Trump had ended his leadership position as US President.

2.3 | Procedure and measures

Unless otherwise stated, all items were asked on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). The means, SDs, scale alphas, and interscale correlations for all measures at each wave are presented in Table 1.

2.3.1 | Wave 1

Measures at Wave 1 assessed the initial perceptions of Donald Trump. Demographic information was collected first, and then the following measures were presented in a counter-balanced order. As noted in our pre-registration, we also included measures of charisma and held similar expectations with charisma as we did for prototypicality and identity advancement. However, we found that our measure of charisma correlated highly with both group prototypicality ($r = .82$) and identity advancement ($r = .84$). Indeed, the nature of charisma as a construct and how to appropriately measure it has been much debated (Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), and its relationship with constructs such as prototypicality has also been called into question (Antonakis et al., 2016). To avoid multicollinearity issues and concerns over construct validity, we removed charisma from the analysis. All items within scales were counter-balanced. After completing the measures, participants were debriefed.

Group prototypicality

Group prototypicality consisted of three items adapted from Abrams et al. (2018). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent Donald Trump: represents what is characteristic of Americans, is typical of Americans, and stands for what Americans have in common.

Identity advancement

To assess the extent to which participants perceived Donald Trump as advancing the in-group's interests, participants were asked four items adapted from Steffens et al. (2014). Participants were asked to indicate to what extent Donald Trump: stands up for Americans, acts as a champion for Americans, promotes the interests of Americans, and has the best interests of Americans at heart.

2.3.2 | Wave 2

Wave 2 utilized a 1×2 (Transgression Context: Neutral vs. Donald Trump) within-participants design to assess the difference in the perceived unethicalness of transgressive behaviors when they were evaluated in isolation compared with when they were committed by Donald Trump. Participants were first presented with a series of three decontextualized transgressive behaviors: sharing false information, nepotism, and abuse of power. Each behavior was accompanied by a short explanation of what the behavior was (see Appendix). For each behavior, participants were asked to rate how unethical the behavior was and how immoral the behavior was. Specifically, participants were asked "to what extent is [transgressive behavior] unethical" and "to what extent is [transgressive behavior] immoral" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). These items were averaged to create a composite index of perceptions of unethicalness. The sequence in which each behavior was presented was randomized.

Participants were then instructed that they would be presented with three excerpts from news articles concerning various behaviors conducted by President Donald Trump during his Presidency. Participants were told that "on the next few pages you will read several short excerpts from newspaper articles discussing some of Donald Trump's behavior and conduct during his time as President. These news excerpts are taken from various time points throughout Trump's Presidency. Please read each news excerpt and then answer the following questions." These news excerpts discussed instances of Donald Trump engaging in the same three behaviors that participants had evaluated previously. Specifically, the sharing of false information (fact checker assertions of Trump making more than 20,000 misleading claims), nepotism (appointing his daughter Ivanka as a US diplomat), and abuse of power (impeachment following withholding military support from Ukraine). The full news excerpts are available in Appendix. For each news excerpt participants were asked to rate the extent to which Donald Trump's behavior described in the news excerpt was unethical and immoral using the same items as in the decontextualized behaviors. Participants were then debriefed.

2.3.3 | Wave 3

Wave 3 assessed both perceptions of Donald Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement following his exit from office and perceptions of how unethical his behavior is. Participants first answered the same group prototypicality and identity

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, alphas, and interscale correlations across waves

Measure	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Wave 1																				
1. Group prototypicality	5.1	1.50	.95	-																
2. Identity advancement	5.71	1.49	.96	.75***	-															
Wave 2																				
3. Sharing false information (neutral condition)	5.69	1.42	.77																	
4. Nepotism (neutral condition)	4.89	1.61	.87	.26***																
5. Abuse of power (neutral condition)	5.86	1.35	.80	.47***	.26***															
6. Sharing false information (Trump condition)	3.94	1.96	.93	.23**	.27***	.21**														
7. Nepotism (Trump condition)	3.52	1.96	.93	.07	.35***	.10	.73***													
8. Abuse of power (Trump condition)	3.83	2.14	.92	.21**	.20***	.16*	.78***	.67***												
Wave 3																				
9. Group prototypicality	4.75	1.71	.97																	
10. Identity advancement	5.44	1.75	.98	.85***																
11. Sharing false information	3.02	1.92	.97	-.67***	-.78***															
12. Nepotism	2.77	1.77	.93	-.62***	-.73***	.82***														
13. Abuse of power	2.82	1.94	.97	-.63***	-.73***	.83***	.84***													
14. Choice of pardoning	2.57	1.76	.96	-.62***	-.71***	.80***	.83***	.80***												
15. Refusal to concede election	2.66	2.08	.96	-.64***	-.74***	.82***	.79***	.75***	.80***											
16. Attempts to overturn election	3.21	2.22	.97	-.69***	-.78***	.84***	.78***	.77***	.76***	.76***										
17. Encouragement of Capitol riots	3.25	2.24	.98	-.64***	-.70***	.80***	.73***	.74***	.77***	.79***	.80***									

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

advancement measures as in Wave 1. Participants were then presented with the same news excerpts discussing the three transgressive behaviors enacted by Donald Trump as in Wave 2. Participants were again asked to indicate the extent to which Donald Trump's behavior described in the excerpt was unethical and immoral.

We also presented four additional news excerpts that concerned behaviors that had occurred since the cessation of Wave 2 data collection. Specifically, additional excerpts concerning Donald Trump's choice of criminal pardoning, refusal to concede the election, attempts to overturn the election, and encouragement of the Capitol riots were included. These were included as control variables to assess whether his recent transgressive behaviors may have influenced any longitudinal changes from Waves 1 and 2 to Wave 3. The full news excerpts are available in [Appendix](#). Participants were again asked to evaluate how unethical and immoral Donald Trump's behavior described in the excerpt was. Additionally, for the new excerpts, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the behavior described in the excerpt had changed how they felt towards Trump (1 = *This behavior made me much less supportive of Trump*, 4 = *I felt the same as I did before/No change*, 7 = *This behavior made me much more supportive of Trump*). The original three news excerpts were presented first (in a randomized order) followed by the four new excerpts (also presented in a randomized order). Participants were then debriefed.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Preliminary analysis

We first compared each transgressive behavior examined in Wave 2 (sharing false information, nepotism, and abuse of power) to assess any initial differences in perceptions of the behaviors. We conducted two repeated-measures ANOVAs; one to compare the perceived unethicalness of the three behaviors when evaluated in isolation (neutral condition) and one to compare the three behaviors when conducted by Donald Trump. For the behaviors evaluated in isolation, there was a significant omnibus effect, $F(2, 346) = 31.71, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$. Bonferroni controlled pairwise comparisons revealed that nepotism ($M = 4.89, SE = 0.12$) was evaluated as significantly less unethical ($ps < .001$) than both sharing of false information ($M = 5.69, SE = 0.11$) and abuse of power ($M = 5.86, SE = 0.10$). There was no significant difference between abuse of power and sharing of false information.

For evaluations when Donald Trump had committed the behaviors, there was also a significant omnibus effect, $F(2, 346) = 7.22, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Again, Bonferroni controlled pairwise comparisons revealed that nepotism conducted by Donald Trump ($M = 3.52, SE = 0.15$) was viewed as significantly less unethical than both sharing of false information ($M = 3.94, SE = 0.15, p = .001$) and abuse of power ($M = 3.83, SE = 0.16, p = .047$).

As discussed in Section 2, we included several additional behaviors in Wave 3 to account for recent transgressions committed by Donald Trump after the cessation of Wave 2 data collection. To assess whether these more recent behaviors influenced participants' feelings of support towards Donald Trump, we first conducted one-sample t -tests on the change in support items for each of the new behaviors (choice of pardoning, refusal to concede, attempts to overturn the election, and encouragement of the Capitol riots) to compare the scale mean against the scale mid-point (4). Only the mean of the Capitol riot excerpt ($M = 3.52, SD = 1.68$) significantly differed from the scale mid-point, $t(101) = -2.89, p = .005, d = -.29$. Overall participants felt that Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riot made them feel less supportive of him relative to the scale mid-point.

A repeated-measures ANOVA with Bonferroni controlled pairwise comparisons also confirmed that perceptions of Trump's unethicalness for encouraging the Capitol riot ($M = 3.27, SE = 0.22$) was significantly higher than both nepotism ($M = 2.79, SE = 0.18, p = .012$), and abuse of power ($M = 2.81, SE = 0.19, p = .014$), but did not significantly differ for sharing of false information at Wave 3 ($M = 3.03, SE = 0.19, p = .430$), $F(3, 300) = 6.24, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Consequently, the analyses for Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 (which consider changes between Waves 1 and 2 and Wave 3), include both the change in support measure and the perceptions of Trump's unethicalness following his encouragement of the Capitol riots measure as a control. In this way, any changes in perceptions from Waves 1 and 2 to Wave 3 control for the influence of Donald Trump's recent encouragement of the Capitol riots.

Hypothesis 1: *To test the hypothesis that transgressive behaviors would be evaluated as less unethical when committed by Donald Trump compared with a neutral condition, we conducted repeated-measures ANOVAs for each of the three transgressive behaviors: sharing of false information, nepotism, and abuse of power. Results were analyzed from the measures taken from Wave 2. For sharing of false information, the ANOVA was significant, $F(1, 173) = 116.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .40$. Sharing of false information was evaluated as significantly less unethical when committed by Donald Trump ($M = 3.94, SE = 0.15$) than when evaluated in isolation ($M = 5.69, SE = 0.11$). For nepotism, the ANOVA was also significant, $F(1, 173) = 77.30, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$. Nepotism was evaluated as significantly less unethical when committed by Donald Trump ($M = 3.52, SE = 0.15$) than when evaluated in isolation ($M = 4.90, SE = 0.12$). Finally, the ANOVA for abuse of power was also significant, $F(1, 173) = 130.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .43$. Abuse of power was evaluated as significantly less unethical when committed by Donald Trump ($M = 3.83, SE = 0.16$) than when evaluated in isolation ($M = 5.86, SE = 0.10$).*

Hypothesis 2: *To assess whether group prototypicality and identity advancement measured at Wave 1 would predict the difference in evaluation between the neutral and Trump transgression*

conditions at Wave 2, we conducted residualized change score regression models for each of the three transgressive behaviors (see Castro-Schilo & Grimm, 2018; Jennings & Cribbie, 2016). For each model, we regressed the perception of Trump's unethicalness on perceptions of Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement, with participants' perception of the neutral transgression included as a control. Consequently, these models effectively predict the difference in perception of Trump's transgression after accounting for the participant's initial perception of the neutral transgression.

The results of the three regression models are displayed in Table 2. Across all three transgressive behaviors, only the identity advancement measure was significant. Group prototypicality did not significantly predict the change in perceptions of unethicalness for any of the transgressive behaviors.

Hypothesis 3: To assess whether Donald Trump's behavior would be viewed as more unethical after his exit from office compared with whilst he was still President, we conducted repeated-measures ANCOVAs comparing perceptions of Trump's unethicalness for sharing false information, nepotism, and abuse of power at Wave 2 and Wave 3, controlling for his encouragement of the Capitol riot.

Perceptions of Donald Trump's unethicalness in response to sharing of false information did not significantly change from Wave 2 ($M = 3.81$, $SE = 0.19$) to Wave 3 ($M = 3.03$, $SE = 0.18$), $F(1, 98) = 1.26$, $p = .264$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Likewise, evaluations of Trump's unethicalness for engaging in nepotism also did not significantly change from Wave 2 ($M = 3.13$, $SE = 0.18$) to Wave 3 ($M = 2.77$, $SE = 0.12$), $F(1, 99) = 3.70$, $p = .057$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Finally, perceptions of Trump's unethicalness for abuse of power did not significantly change from Wave 2 ($M = 3.65$, $SE = 0.20$) to Wave 3 ($M = 2.82$, $SE = 0.13$), $F(1, 99) = 0.46$, $p < .500$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$.

Hypothesis 4: To assess whether Donald Trump would be seen as less group prototypical and less identity advancing after his exit from office (Wave 3) than whilst he was currently still in office (Wave 1), we conducted repeated-measures ANCOVAs comparing group prototypicality and identity advancement at Waves 1 and 3, controlling for the effect of Donald Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riot. Donald Trump was not viewed as significantly less prototypical at Wave 3 ($M = 4.76$, $SE = 0.13$) than at Wave 1 ($M = 5.11$, $SE = 0.14$), $F(1, 99) = 0.11$, $p = .741$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$. Trump was also not viewed as significantly less identity advancing at Wave 3 ($M = 5.44$, $SE = 0.13$) than at Wave 1 ($M = 5.82$, $SE = 0.12$), $F(1, 99) = 0.49$, $p = .484$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$.

Hypothesis 5: To assess whether changes in perceptions of Donald Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement from Wave 1 to Wave 3 correlated with changes in perceptions of Trump's unethicalness from Wave 2 to Wave 3, we used the *rmcorr* package (Bakdash & Marusich, 2017) in R to conduct a repeated-measures correlation between the variables. Unfortunately, the *rmcorr* does not allow for partial correlations directly. To control for the effects of Donald Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riot, we therefore first conducted linear regression models to compute the residuals of the group prototypicality, identity advancement, and the perceived unethicalness measures after controlling for the effects of riot. We then computed the repeated-measures correlations between the residual measures, effectively computing the partial correlation between measures after controlling for the effects of the riot.

The repeated-measures correlations between the group prototypicality, identity advancement, sharing of false information, nepotism, and abuse of power measures, controlling for the effects of Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riots, are displayed in Table 3. Notably, changes in identity advancement significantly correlated

Transgression	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Sharing false information				20.77	3, 170	<.001	.27
Group prototypicality	-.02	-0.15	0.877				
Identity advancement	-.58	-4.40	<.001				
Neutral condition unethicalness	.29	3.14	.002				
Nepotism				24.73	3, 170	<.001	.29
Group prototypicality	.09	0.67	.505				
Identity advancement	-.61	-4.72	<.001				
Neutral condition unethicalness	.47	5.99	<.001				
Abuse of power				11.61	3, 170	<.001	0.16
Group prototypicality	-.10	-0.65	.515				
Identity advancement	-.45	-2.94	.004				
Neutral condition unethicalness	.22	1.95	.052				

TABLE 2 Regression models for Hypothesis 2

with changes in Trump's perceived unethicalness for sharing of false information and nepotism. Specifically, individuals who showed decreases in perceptions of Donald Trump's identity advancement concomitantly displayed increases in perceptions of Donald Trump's unethicalness. However, changes in identity advancement did not significantly correlate with changes in perceived unethicalness for the abuse of power excerpt, and changes in group prototypicality did not significantly correlate with any of the unethicalness measures.

3.2 | Exploratory analysis

Our repeated-measures correlation analysis provided evidence that changes in identity advancement over time were associated with changes in perceptions of unethicalness for false information and nepotism over time. To provide further insight into the possible causal direction of this association, we conducted a cross-lagged panel analysis to examine the cross-lagged effects of identity advancement at Wave 1 on perceptions of Donald Trump's unethicalness at Wave 3. Likewise, we assessed the effect of Donald Trump's perceived unethicalness at Wave 2 on perceptions of his

identity advancement at Wave 3. Given the nonsignificant correlations for group prototypicality and the abuse of power transgression, we removed these measures from the analysis. Perceptions of Trump's unethicalness and changes in support for his encouragement of the Capitol riots were included as controls.

The overall cross-lagged panel model is displayed in Figure 1. The overall model showed adequate fit to the data, $\chi^2(4) = 18.68, p = .001$, CFI = 0.974, RMSEA = 0.191. As shown in Figure 1, the cross-lagged paths from identity advancement at Wave 1 to perceptions of Trump's unethicalness for sharing false information and nepotism at Wave 3 were both significant. In contrast, the cross-lagged paths from perceptions of Trump's unethicalness for sharing false information and nepotism at Wave 2 to identity advancement at Wave 3 were both nonsignificant.

4 | DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand how followers of transgressive leaders rationalize their leader's behavior, to what extent group prototypicality and identity advancement encourage this rationalization, and whether these effects would persist after a leader exits their leadership position. Specifically, we expected that Republicans would downplay the perceived unethicalness of behavior by Donald Trump relative to the same behavior when unattributed, and that this downplaying would be predicted by perceptions of Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement. We also expected that, following his election loss, Donald Trump would be perceived as less prototypical and less identity advancing, and concomitantly as more unethical. In partial support of these hypotheses, we found that Republicans did indeed downplay the perceived unethicalness of Donald Trump's behavior, but that this was only predicted by perceptions of his identity advancement, and not his group prototypicality. In contrast to expectations, perceptions of Donald Trump's prototypicality and identity advancement, after controlling for his encouragement of the Capitol riots, did not decrease after his

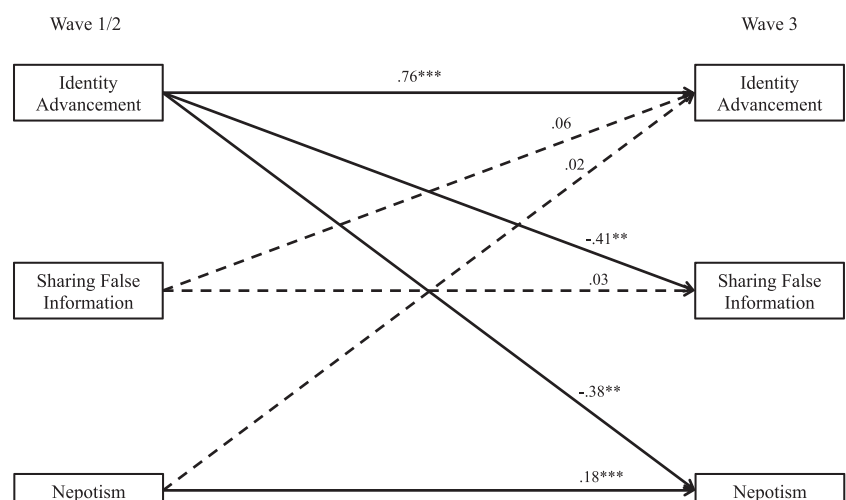
TABLE 3 Repeated measures correlations for Hypothesis 5

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Prototypicality	-					
2. Group-serving orientation	.47***	-				
3. Charisma	.58**	.63***	-			
4. False information sharing	-.16	-.31**	-.26**	-		
5. Nepotism	-.12	-.24*	-.23*	.62***	-	
6. Abuse of power	-.06	-.09	-.14	.71***	.50***	-

Note: $N = 101$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

FIGURE 1 Cross-lagged model. Note: Dashed lines represent nonsignificant pathways. Perceptions of Donald Trump's unethicalness for encouraging the Capitol riots and changes in support for Donald Trump following the Capitol riots were included in the model as controls. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$



election loss, and neither did perceptions of his unethicalness increase. However, we found that intra-individual drops in perceptions of Trump's identity advancement (but not group prototypicality) did correspond with increases in perceptions of his unethicalness for two of the three transgressive behaviors. Evidence from the cross-lagged analysis is consistent with the interpretation that initial perceptions of identity advancement influenced later evaluations of Donald Trump's unethicalness, rather than the reverse. Overall, these results provide an important extension of previous deviance credit theory and research, highlighting the role of identity advancement and presenting the rationalization of a leader's behavior as a novel mechanism in the support of transgressive leaders. The applied and longitudinal nature of this study additionally demonstrates how social psychological processes operate in real-world contexts, providing a much-needed contribution to more ecologically valid behavioral research.

4.1 | Theoretical implications

In line with assertions from Otten and Gordijn (2014), we find that in-group members do indeed downplay the severity of their leader's transgression. Specifically, Republicans viewed the sharing of false information, nepotism, and abuse of power as less unethical when these behaviors were attributed to Donald Trump than when they were unattributed. This represents a marked contrast with the black sheep effect, whereby in-group deviants are often more strongly derogated than others (Marques & Paez, 1994). Thus, the finding offers an important caveat and factor to be addressed by subjective group dynamics theory (Marques et al., 1998, 2001). When the deviant is a leader their centrality in the group makes their transgressive behavior an even greater threat to the group (Pinto et al., 2010). However, rather than risk derogating the leader, group members may instead choose to downplay the severity of the leader's behavior, such as by construing it as less unethical. Such downplaying likely mitigates the potential damage that their deviance has for the subjective validity of the group.

The finding that Donald Trump's behavior is perceived as less unethical when attributed than when unattributed also speaks to the broader literature on the conceptualization of unethical leadership. The study of unethical leadership has often been approached and defined from two perspectives: the deontological approach, whereby unethical leadership is defined on the basis of moral principles (e.g., deontological or utilitarian) being violated (Ünal et al., 2012), and the descriptive approach, whereby unethical leadership is defined as the subjective perception that a leader has behaved unethically (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Our evidence is consistent with the descriptive approach and suggests that what constitutes unethical leadership may exist in the eye of the beholder. Specifically, our findings indicate that perceptions of unethicalness may be inherently fluid and subjective, and are influenced by social identity processes such as the social identity of the perceiver and the identity advancement of the transgressor.

In addition to subjective group dynamics and social identity processes, it is also possible that the typical ideological preferences of conservative groups may explain Republicans' rationalization of Donald Trump's transgressive behavior. For example, conservative groups, such as Republicans, typically score higher on traits such as authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981) and social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) than more liberal groups (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009). Such traits are associated with obedience and submission to authority figures, so Republicans may be more inclined to downplay the perceived unethicalness of Donald Trump's behavior owing to their ideological tendency to submit to authority figures. Indeed, previous research has found that authoritarianism predicted intentions to vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 US election (Crowson & Brandes, 2017). However, it should be noted that not all conservatives are authoritarian, and even members of liberal groups can hold authoritarian attitudes (Wronski et al., 2018). Authoritarianism is also associated with conformity to traditional values and upholding the rule of law (Duckitt et al., 2010), which would be expected to predict less, rather than more, support for delinquent leaders. Additional research into these alternative explanations is needed to assess how differences in ideological preferences may affect followers' rationalization of their leader's conduct, and how such processes may interact with the motivation to uphold the group's subjective validity.

We also find that this downplaying is predicted by perceptions of the leader's commitment to advancing group interests. This is consistent with previous research, suggesting that leaders must act for the group to receive support (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001), especially in the context of transgressions (Abrams et al., 2013). However, our findings provide an extension of this prior work by demonstrating that identity advancement plays a role not only in the endorsement of leaders, but also in how group members rationalize their behavior. This suggests an additional novel pathway to Abrams et al.'s (2018) deviance credit model. Specifically, identity advancement may first influence group members cognitive representations of their leader's transgressive behavior, downplaying its severity, which may subsequently influence endorsement.

Contrary to our expectations, however, we find no evidence that perceptions of group prototypicality uniquely influence the downplaying of a leader's transgressive behavior. Indeed, there is an emerging body of literature that suggests that prototypicality and identity advancement are substitutable, and that the influence of prototypicality becomes weaker when considered in the context of the group serving leaders. For example, van Knippenberg and Knippenberg (2005) find that non-prototypical leaders can maintain endorsement by making self-sacrificial behaviors in the name of the group. A recent meta-analysis by Steffens et al. (2021) also finds that the relationship between prototypicality and leader endorsement becomes weaker when controlling for identity advancement.

The present findings suggest that this weakened effect extends beyond mere endorsement of leaders, and that identity advancement also weakens the influence that group prototypicality has in the rationalization and cognitive construction of transgressive leader behaviors. Given that the two may be substitutable, the present study

also indicates that identity advancement may be a key driver of group prototypicality. This has important implications for the deviance credit model, as Abrams et al. (2018) did not consider the mediating roles of prototypicality and identity advancement *simultaneously* in the context of transgressive leaders. The present findings suggest that the mediating role of prototypicality in transgression credit may become weaker or null when perceptions of identity advancement are considered. Alternatively, the null effect of group prototypicality in our data may be driven by the specific subset of Republicans obtained in our sample. In particular, it may be the case that Republicans who are strong supporters of Donald Trump specifically, rather than of the Republican Party as a whole, may feel indifferent to how group prototypical Donald Trump is when supporting him. Instead, such supporters of Donald Trump may express a blind allegiance to his leadership, akin to the conferral mechanism theorized by Abrams et al. (2018), which may negate any effect of group prototypicality. Although we did not measure party support, the high means of our group prototypicality and identity advancement measures indicate that our sample predominantly supported Donald Trump, which may explain why group prototypicality failed to influence Republicans' rationalization of Trump's behavior.

Also contrary to expectations, we found no evidence that perceptions of Donald Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement decreased following his exit as President, nor did we find evidence that perceptions of his unethicalness increased. However, we do note that Donald Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riots was a significant covariate in our analysis. Indeed, the predicted changes in perceptions of prototypicality and identity advancement were statistically significant when we did not control for the Capitol riot event. This suggests that changes in perceptions of Donald Trump may have responded to his most recent transgressions, rather than because he exited his leadership role. Indeed, as our analysis suggests, Donald Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riots were perceived as more unethical than his other behaviors. Given that very severe transgressions by leaders, such as overt displays of racism, prevent transgression credit (Abrams et al., 2014), it is possible that Trump had crossed a threshold of severity with the Capitol riot, which consequently impacted Republican's perceptions of Trump, rather than his exit as President being responsible.

Alternatively, it is possible that insufficient time had passed since Donald Trump's exit as President for any clear drops in group prototypicality and identity advancement to be detectable. Indeed, Wave 3 of our study was conducted only a day after Joe Biden's inauguration, and it is likely that many Republicans had not yet conceptualized or accepted that Donald Trump was no longer President. This is especially likely for Republicans who categorize themselves as Trump supporters, rather than as Republicans more broadly. For these individuals, Donald Trump may continue to be perceived as a leader figure long after his exit as President. Such individuals may also be inclined to further rationalize and support Donald Trump's behavior as a sign of their continued loyalty. In the eyes of some Republicans, despite the outcome of the election, this bolstered support for Donald Trump and his behavior may serve the legitimacy of Donald Trump assuming a leadership position in the future.

The present data make it unclear whether the protective effects of group prototypicality and identity advancement may cease after exiting a leadership position. It is possible that, given sufficient time, perceptions of Donald Trump's group prototypicality and identity advancement will decrease and he will be treated much the same as a typical group member (Abrams et al., 2008). However, we note that when considered at the individual level, decreases in identity advancement do correlate with increased perceptions of Trump's unethicalness over time, and our cross-lagged panel analysis suggests that identity advancement may be the causal construct. We also note that these effects persist even after controlling for the influence of Donald Trump's encouragement of the Capitol riots. Although we cannot confirm that exiting a leadership role may prompt this negative relationship, this finding does further highlight the important and longitudinal role that identity advancement plays in the rationalization of a leader's transgressive behavior.

4.2 | Practical implications

The extent to which group members downplay the transgressive behavior of their leader has worrying implications for leadership. Ultimately, it appears that devout followers are willing to explain away even the most serious breaches of law and morality by their leaders. As the US Capitol riots illustrate, the rationalization of a leader's transgressive behavior and continued support for them can culminate in serious attacks on democracy and social order. When the behavior in question also has racist, xenophobic, or sexist undertones, as many of Donald Trump's behaviors have, the downplaying of behavior as less unethical by followers creates the opportunity for such behavior to become acceptable and normalized among large proportions of the general public. Indeed, Edwards and Rushin (2018) found substantial increases in hate crimes following Donald Trump's 2016 election win. These implications from our findings highlight the imperative need to understand how the support and positive construal of transgressive leader behaviors can be mitigated.

Our finding that decreases in perceptions of identity advancement are associated with increased perceptions of unethicalness also has implications for the role that false news plays in the support of transgressive leaders. Such news, especially when controlled by the in-group, often misrepresents behavior in a group serving manner, which our results suggest promotes the downplaying of their behavior as less unethical. For example, Donald Trump frequently overexaggerated the strength of the US economy (Kiely et al., 2020) or its testing capacity for coronavirus (Greenberg, 2020) during his time as President, painting his presidency as achieving the best for Americans. The present study indicates that such claims only exacerbate the extent to which people downplay his transgressive behavior. This does however point to a potential mitigation strategy: removing the platform of such leaders to share their biased claims. Following the Capitol riots, Twitter (a key source of Donald Trump's misleading claims) and several other social media platforms banned Donald Trump from using their services.

Although this may be a useful tool in mitigating support for transgressive leadership, Donald Trump's most devout supporters are likely to remain undeterred, as social media bans typically encourage followers to migrate to alternative platforms (Ribeiro et al., 2020). Such bans may also cause backlash, such as the widespread discourse on free speech and censorship following Donald Trump's social media bans, which may further bolster support amongst his followers. Nonetheless, removing the ability for transgressive leaders to reframe their behavior in a group serving light may act as a useful tool, if enacted correctly, in mitigating support for their behavior among large portions of the population.

4.3 | Limitations and future directions

We acknowledge several limitations of this study. Firstly, we note that this study essentially comprises a case study into Donald Trump. Whilst his actions do present the opportunity to examine how people conceptualize transgressive leader behaviors in a highly meaningful and consequential applied setting, it is unclear whether the findings in this study are unique to Donald Trump or general effects that apply to leadership more broadly. The applied context of this study, whilst being beneficial with regard to ecological validity, also presents additional problems. Most notably for the present research, several salient confounds, such as the Capitol riots and Donald Trump's attempts to overturn the election, occurred in between the administration of Wave 2 and Wave 3. Whilst we have controlled for these events where possible, these likely have had undue influence on any longitudinal changes. Future laboratory experiments are needed to examine these effects within a decontextualized environment with greater experimental control.

Finally, we note that our conclusions are confined to the specific political context of this study. For example, whilst we aimed to examine how the rationalization of a leader's transgressive behavior changed after their exit from their leadership position, the political context means we actually examine how these changes occur specifically after an *election loss*. We accept that our conclusions are limited to this point. Additional studies are needed to assess whether similar patterns of results occur for other more mundane exits from leadership, such as reaching the natural end of a leadership term. As well as addressing these limitations, future studies should also explore how to mitigate the support of transgressive leaders, and how their behavior can be reframed in a way that minimizes its downplaying among supporters. One potential avenue is to explore how de-platforming such transgressive leaders limits their ability to reframe their behavior in a desired light.

5 | CONCLUSION

Overall, the present study identifies the rationalization of transgressive leader behaviors as a novel pathway to their continued support. We also identify identity advancement as a key driver of this effect.

These results provide an important extension of deviance credit and indicate that the role of group prototypicality in the context of group serving leaders may need to be reconsidered. These results also have worrying implications for the nature of transgressive leadership and demonstrate how unimpeachable such leadership may become once it is established. The common reframing of leader behavior in a group serving manner only exacerbates this problem. These findings point to a crucial need for mitigation strategies in managing transgressive leadership. Without these, such behavior can become entrenched and threaten to unravel the social fabric, trust, and democracy of entire communities. Our present theorizing suggests that reducing perceptions of leaders as group-serving may be one possible solution.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data and analysis code that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/h2u9k/?view_only=0955a203d12b4780acef0022002a0b3e.

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ENDNOTE

¹ We recognize that there is a substantial division in viewpoints regarding the behavior of Donald Trump. In light of this, we note that any and all evaluative statements made in regard to the behavior of Donald Trump are the opinions of the authors and made without knowledge of falsity or a reckless disregard for whether it was false.

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APPENDIX

Instructions for Decontextualized Transgressions

The following questions will present a series of three different behaviors. We would like you to think about each behavior, and then answer several questions on how you perceive the behavior.

Thinking about the sharing of false information (sharing information, i.e., inaccurate).

1. To what extent is the sharing of false information unethical.
2. To what extent is the sharing of false information immoral.

Thinking about nepotism (using your power or position to favor a friend or family member over others e.g. by offering them a job):

Thinking about abuse of power (e.g., the improper use of your authority to solicit desired behaviors from others).

News Excerpts for Donald Trump's Transgressions

Sharing False Information (adapted from Aratani, 2020)

"President Donald Trump has made over 20,000 false or misleading claims during his time in Office, findings from Fact Checker agencies suggest. Donald Trump made false claims on topics ranging from employment to the US economy."

Nepotism (adapted from Smith, 2019)

"Donald Trump has been criticized for taking nepotism to alarming new depths after appointing his daughter Ivanka to a prominent role in meetings with the G20. Many have criticized the move by President Trump, suggesting Ivanka has no qualifications for the role further than being the President's daughter."

Abuse of Power (adapted from Przybyla & Edelman, 2019)

"A formal House inquiry charged Trump with abuse of power, alleging that Donald Trump solicited foreign interference in the 2020 U.S. presidential election to help his re-election. The inquiry reported that Trump had abused his position as President by threatening to

withhold military aid from Ukraine unless its Prime Minister investigated Trump's political opponents."

Choice of Pardoning (adapted from BBC, 2020)

"Trump has pardoned dozens of people in the last month, including former campaign chairman Paul Manafort (convicted of financial fraud), ex-aide Steven Bannon (charged with fraud), and four Blackwater military contractors who were involved in a 2007 massacre in Iraq. Opponents accuse Trump's choice of pardons as abusing the justice system."

Refusal to Concede the 2020 Election (adapted from Horton, 2020; Spring, 2020)

"President Trump refuses to concede the election, suggesting fraud and stolen votes make the US Presidential Election results illegitimate. Amid his 'stop the steal' campaign, the President's legal team has issued several legal challenges aimed at blocking the certification of election results in states where Donald Trump lost."

Attempts to Overturn the 2020 Election (adapted from Sullivan & Martina, 2021)

"A phone recording revealed that Donald Trump attempted to overturn the election result by pressuring the Georgia Secretary of State to "find 11,780 votes" in Georgia, which would be just enough to overturn the result in the state. In the call the President raises the vague prospect of a "criminal offence" if the officials did not change the vote count."

Encouragement of the Capitol riots (adapted from Holland et al., 2021)

"Donald Trump has received wide-spread criticism for encouraging his supporters to break into the Capitol building yesterday. Addressing the pro-Trump crowd hours before they stormed the Capitol, Trump told them to "stop the steal" and that "we will never concede". Many have condemned his encouragement of the riot."