For the reactions to Thursday's revelations in the Washington Post about Alabama Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore-in an article based on interviews with more than thirty people, the paper reported that the candidate sexually abused a fourteen-year-old girl in 1979, and pursued relationships with several other teen-agers when he was in his thirties—are a sign that the partisan rationalization of even the most abhorrent behavior is not exclusive to Trumpism.

Some Washington Republicans have been unequivocal—Senator John McCain, of Arizona, said on Twitter that Moore should “immediately step down” if “these allegations are true.” On Thursday, Moore attacked the Post’s report, saying, “This garbage is the very definition of fake news and intentional defamation.” On Friday afternoon, in a radio interview with Sean Hannity, Moore conceded that he knew two of the women who told the Post he had sought relationships with them when they were teen-agers, but he denied knowing the woman who said that he had abused her. “I didn’t date them,” he said. “Seven years old is too young for you to do stuff like that.”

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At the same time, Sides said, Trump’s rise has come at a time of intense debate among academics about the relationship between partisanship and ideology. The political scientist Danny Hayes, of the University of Notre Dame, told me on Friday, “It’s about affect and emotion,” Sides told me. “Partisanship induces motivated reasoning. We align our perceptions and beliefs to be consonant with our social identities.”

Sides considered the comment from Blocker, the Alabama Republican official who could never consider voting for the Democrat running against Moore. “That’s the tribalism that provides the incentive to excuse any kind of behavior,” Sides said. “It’s about affect and emotion,” he said. “Partisanship induces motivated reasoning. We align our perceptions and beliefs to be consonant with our social identities.”

Sides examined this issue in a 2012 paper called “Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization.” As the political scientist Hayes suggested, the Trump era, Moore might have a chance at retaining support from these voters. As Thomas Edsall recently noted, from 2011 to 2016, the percentage of white evangelical Protestants who believe that “an elected official who commits an immoral act in their personal life can still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public and professional life” shot up, from thirty to seventy-two percent. In early 2016, at a campaign rally in Iowa, Donald Trump famously said, “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose voters.” Much of the rest of Trump’s campaign, and his subsequent presidency, has seemed like that instead of rhetoric. He defined not just on tax-cutting and regulatory simplification, but on the personal relationships with several other teen-agers when he was in his thirties—a sign that the partisan rationalization of even the most abhorrent behavior is not exclusive to Trumpism.

McConnell’s statement appears relatively even-toned and direct. One either believes the evidence laid out in the story or doesn’t. “If it is true,” McConnell said, “then Roy Moore should resign.”

But Moore might have a chance at retaining support from these voters. As Thomas Edsall recently noted, from 2011 to 2016, the percentage of white evangelical Protestants who believe that “an elected official who commits an immoral act in their personal life can still behave ethically and fulfill their duties in their public and professional life” shot up, from thirty to seventy-two percent. In early 2016, at a campaign rally in Iowa, Donald Trump famously said, “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose voters.” Much of the rest of Trump’s campaign, and his subsequent presidency, has seemed like that instead of rhetoric. He defined not just on tax-cutting and regulatory simplification, but on the personal relationships with several other teen-agers when he was in his thirties—a sign that the partisan rationalization of even the most abhorrent behavior is not exclusive to Trumpism.

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