Running head: RESOLVING THE PROGRESSIVE PARADOX

Resolving the Progressive Paradox: Conservative Value Framing of Progressive Economic Policies Increases Candidate Support

Jan G. Voelkel[a]

Robb Willer[a]

[a]: Department of Sociology, Stanford University, Stanford, USA

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Email addresses: jvoelkel@stanford.edu, willer@stanford.edu

Abstract

While polls show progressive economic policies are popular, progressive candidates typically lose elections in the U.S. One explanation for this *progressive paradox* is that the opponents of progressive candidates often win through "symbolic politics," successfully harnessing values and ideologies that receive broad support from the general public. Here we explore one solution to the progressive paradox, testing whether progressive candidates achieve greater support by framing their policy platforms in terms of values and ideologies that resonate beyond the progressive base. We tested this claim in two experiments (total N=4,138), including one pre-registered experiment conducted on a nationally representative sample. We found that a presidential candidate who framed his progressive economic platform to be consistent with more conservative value concerns like patriotism, family, and respect for tradition – as opposed to more liberal value concerns like equality and social justice – was supported significantly more by conservatives and, unexpectedly, by moderates as well. These effects were mediated by perceived value similarity with the candidate. Furthermore, a manipulation of how progressive the candidate's platform was had weak and inconsistent effects, and did not interact with the framing of the platform. These findings indicate that in our experiments framing mattered more than policy, suggesting that moral reframing could be an effective alternative to policy centrism for candidates seeking broader support. Our results illustrate the important effects of value framing of economic policy, offering a solution to the longstanding puzzle regarding the gap between progressive policy and candidate support.

Keywords: framing, persuasion, economic policy, political psychology, moral psychology

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Surveys find that large majorities of Americans view economic inequality in the U.S. as excessive, indicating that they would prefer to live in a more egalitarian society (Franks & Scherr, 2018; McCall, Burk, Laperriere, & Richeson 2017; Norton & Ariely, 2011) and supporting progressive economic policies (Horowitz, Parker, Graf, & Livingston, 2017; Levitz, 2018; Moore, 2016; Reinhart, 2018). However, these stated policy preferences are not reflected in American electoral results, as candidates who champion progressive economic policies typically lose to less progressive opponents (Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Frank, 2004). How can this tension between the policies most Americans support and the politicians they elect be resolved?

Here we investigate one solution to this paradox, the possibility that candidates who frame progressive economic policies in terms of conservative values will be supported more than progressive candidates who use a liberal value framework. Prior research suggests that conservative value concerns such as patriotism, protection of the family, and respect for American traditions resonate broadly with the American public (Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Lakoff, 2004). By contrast, progressive leaders have typically employed rationales for progressive policy that focus on principles of economic justice and egalitarianism (cf. Lipset & Marks, 2001). While such appeals are likely effective for mobilizing committed support from the American left, appeals with resonance beyond the progressive base may reduce the gap between Americans' views of progressive policy and their support for progressive politicians.

The Progressive Paradox

We define progressive economic policies as governmental interventions to the free market that aim to reduce economic inequality, poverty, or increase opportunities for upward mobility.[1] Majorities of Americans support prominent progressive economic policies such as raising the minimum wage (Moore, 2016), paid parental leave (Horowitz, Parker, Graf, & Livingston, 2017), investments in infrastructure (Reinhart, 2018), and universal health care (Levitz, 2018). Further, a majority of Americans have supported progressive economic policies over conservative economic policies for decades (Ellis & Stimson, 2012).

These data on policy attitudes, however, stand in stark contrast to the striking failure to implement progressive economic policy in the U.S. Compared to other Western, industrialized countries, the United States has a tax system that is relatively favorable to the wealthy (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Lawson & Martin, 2018; Piketty & Saez, 2007), a relatively small welfare state (Esping-Andersen & Myles, 2008), a low rate of unionization (Eidlin, 2015), and lacks an influential labor party (Eidlin, 2016; Lipset & Marks, 2001). Despite their support for progressive economic policies, Americans do not vote consistently for candidates who champion these policies (Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Frank, 2004), a pattern that continues to hold (Nilsen, 2018). A decades-old literature has identified a number of explanations for this "progressive paradox", highlighting a range of factors, from the challenge of organizing America's racially diverse working class (Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, Cooley, & Payne, 2017; Du Bois, 1899; Lipset & Marks, 2001; Norton & Summers, 2011) to the out-sized influence of wealthy donors in American politics (Gilens & Page, 2014; Goss, 2016; Hacker & Pierson, 2010).

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[1] We use the term "progressive" instead of "liberal" to describe left-wing economic policies in order to avoid confusion because "liberal" could be understood as the modern American liberalism that embraces market regulation for the sake of social justice, or as neoliberalism that embraces free-market capitalism.

The explanation most relevant to our research is the claim that, while the policies of progressive candidates are generally quite popular, their electoral opponents' often win elections through superior "symbolic politics," successfully employing values and ideologies that receive broad support in the majority conservative American public (Ellis & Stimson, 2012; Grossmann & Hopkins, 2016; Lakoff, 2004). By contrast, progressive candidates have a long history of embedding their rationales for progressive economic policies in a value framework focused on social justice and equality, rarely employing more conservative values and ideologies like patriotism and religiosity that are widely held by the working class (cf. Lipset & Marks, 2001). Some have even argued that progressive economic policies are fundamentally inconsistent with values and ideologies widely held among American conservatives (Martin, 2015). Thus, the tension described by the progressive paradox can in part be attributed to the perceived inconsistency between many Americans' preferences for progressive economic policies on the one hand and conservative value concerns on the other.

Reconciling Progressive Policies and Conservative Value Concerns

The current research investigates the possibility that progressive economic policies and conservative value concerns are in fact reconcilable, a claim that – if true – would allow progressive candidates to appeal to voters who are ideologically conservative. This claim fits with recent work showing that the ideological and value bases of policies are quite malleable, and that these policies can be reframed as consistent with values and ideologies of those who do not currently support those policies, leading to increased support as a result. For example, individuals high in system justification were more supportive of pro-environmental policies after reading a message that framed environmental protection as a way to preserve American traditions (Feygina, Goldsmith, & Jost, 2010).

Consistent with this, prior work on "moral reframing" (Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015; Kidwell, Farmer, & Hardesty 2013; Voelkel & Feinberg, 2018; Wolsko, Ariceaga, & Seiden 2016; cf. Day, Fiske, Downing, & Trail 2014) finds that various political positions can be persuasively reframed as consistent with values of different ideological groups. For example, results of one experiment showed that reading an essay emphasizing that gay men and women were proud and patriotic Americans increased conservatives' support for same-sex marriage relative to a more conventional argument for same-sex marriage based on egalitarianism. Similarly, liberals who read an argument that the military helps disadvantaged people overcome poverty and inequality reported significantly greater support for military spending than liberals who read a pro-military spending argument based on patriotism and respect for authority (Feinberg & Willer, 2015). A recent study extended this argument to the framing of redistributive policies, finding that when these policies were framed as consistent with values of loyalty, traditions, and purity, donations for an organization working towards the reduction of economic inequality increased among people who endorse loyalty values (Franks & Scherr, 2018). Building on this work, we propose that progressive candidates can increase electoral success by framing their policies as consistent with conservative value concerns and that this increase will be greatest among more conservative voters.[2]

Note that this prediction is non-trivial for several reasons. First, moral concerns regarding harm and justice are often seen as universally recognized whereas patriotism and respect for traditions are part of the moral sense that characterizes conservatives, but not liberals (Haidt, 2012). Based on this, one might expect that liberal value framing will result in larger overall

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[2] Note that the correlation between these values and policies observed in the contemporary U.S. is not inevitable. In other time periods progressive policies have been rhetorically linked with values like group loyalty and religious sanctity, values that we currently associate with political conservatism.

support than conservative value framing because it resonates with a larger group of people. However, work on moral reframing suggests that conservatives are typically unpersuaded by liberal value framing (e.g. Feinberg & Willer, 2013, 2015), casting doubt on the universal appeal of liberal moral foundations. Second, it may be rhetorically impossible to coherently advocate for progressive policies in terms of conservative value concerns. This would be the case if conservative values are inextricably linked to conservative economic policies. We argue instead that the relationship between progressive policy and conservative value concerns is more malleable, making it possible to craft these connections in coherent and persuasive ways.

The Present Research

The aim of the current research is to test the idea that conservative value framing increases support for progressive political candidates. Specifically, we test the *moral reframing hypothesis* (Feinberg & Willer, 2015) which in this context proposes that conservative participants will support a progressive political candidate more if he frames his economic policies as consistent with conservative instead of liberal values. We examined this hypothesis in two large-scale experiments as part of a larger project on the influence of policy platforms and value framing on candidate support. We examined levels of support for a hypothetical Democratic candidate in the 2020 presidential election who employed one of three economic platform frames: one based on liberal values of social justice and equality, one based on conservative values of patriotism and tradition, and a third based on a technical emphasis on growth and employment. Our larger project was designed to test several hypotheses related to these treatments, however, in the current paper we focus on the moral reframing hypothesis, i.e. on the comparison of the liberal and the conservative frame conditions and in Study 1, an additional control condition (the hypothesis and results relating to the technical frame condition

which is not relevant to the evaluation of the moral reframing hypothesis are the subject of

another paper).[3]

Several features of our design make our studies rigorous tests of our hypothesis,

advancing prior work on moral reframing in important ways. First, our two experiments were

highly powered with a combined sample size of 4,138 participants. Second, whereas previous

research on moral reframing typically used convenience samples, our second study utilizes a

nationally representative sample, ensuring our results are generalizable to the American public.

Third, our second study followed a pre-registered analysis plan with a priori specified

hypotheses. Fourth, our design in both studies included a second factor that manipulated the

progressiveness of the economic policy platform, allowing us to test the robustness of the

framing effects over two different economic policy platforms.[4] Finally, recent research has

shown that the effects of campaign messages on candidate support can be nullified by salient

party cues (Kalla & Broockman, 2018; see also Cohen, 2003), but party cues are an integral part

of the political landscape. Thus, we tested the effects of value framing in the presence of party

cues to increase the generalizability of our findings. Overall, these methodological features

should ensure relatively high levels of internal and external validity.

Study 1

The first study tested the moral reframing hypothesis in a large-scale, online survey-

experiment. We compared participants' support for a hypothetical Democratic candidate in the

2020 presidential election who framed their progressive economic policy platform as either

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[3] All data, study materials, and analysis scripts for Studies 1 and 2 are openly accessible at
https://osf.io/6vykw/?view_only=01297e35ffcf419bb1681b13c98e9d0a
[4] The policy factor was also included to examine the influence of more progressive policies on candidate support.
We tested two hypotheses for this factor which can be found in the preregistration for Study 2. Results are presented
in the manuscript but due to space reasons and inconclusive results not further discussed.

consistent with liberal or conservative value concerns. In addition, Study 1 included a control frame condition to determine whether potential differences between the liberal and conservative frame conditions represent a positive effect of the conservative frame condition (as predicted by the moral reframing hypothesis) or instead a negative effect of the liberal frame condition.

Method

Participants. Based on a priori power analyses conducted with GPower (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), we estimated we would need a sample size of 1721 to achieve 95% power to detect the interaction effect predicted by the moral reframing hypothesis, assumed to be small in size ($f = .1$). Taking exclusion criteria into account and rounding up to a round number, we aimed for a final sample size of 2500 participants.

We recruited US citizens from a large panel of previously recruited Amazon Mechanical Turk workers. Our initial sample size consisted of 2751 participants who received a small payment for their participation. We excluded three participants due to duplicate IP addresses (keeping only the first case for each participant), 185 participants due to missing values, 119 participants due to failed comprehension checks, and one participant who was below age 18, yielding a final sample of 2443 participants. According to post hoc power analyses, this sample size results in 99% power to detect the interaction effect predicted by the moral reframing hypothesis. Via the use of quota sampling, our sample was approximately representative with regard to gender and ethnicity and consisted of large proportions of liberals (39.7%), moderates (20.5%), and conservatives (39.8%). Demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of the Samples in Studies 1 and 2*

	Study 1	Study 2
Political Ideology		
1 (Extremely liberal)	9%	7%
2	16%	15%
3	15%	14%
4	21%	25%
5	18%	19%
6	14%	14%
7 (Extremely conservative)	7%	6%
Gender		
Female	50%	51%
Male	50%	49%
Other	0.3%	NA
Age	Mean = 38.22; SD = 11.97	Mean = 49.81; SD = 16.71
Ethnicity		
White	62%	66%
Black	13%	11%
Hispanic	18%	17%
Asian	6%	2%
Multiple ethnicities	NA	3%
Other	2%	1%
Education		
No college	9%	19%
Some college	36%	45%
Bachelor's degree	40%	21%
Postgraduate	15%	16%
Income	Median = $50,000 to $59,999	Median = $50,000 to $59,999
Sample size (*n*)	2443	1695

Design, Procedure, and Measures. The study had a 2 (policy condition: moderately progressive versus highly progressive) x 4 (frame condition: control versus liberal versus conservative versus technical) between-subjects design. The procedure consisted of two parts. In

Part 1, participants were introduced to a hypothetical Democratic candidate, Scott Miller running

for president in 2020. Each participant read three sets of information about Scott Miller –

information about his economic policy platform (policy information), excerpts from a speech

given by him about his political principles (frame information), and excerpts from the same

speech about how his policies and principles are linked (policy and frame information). The

order of the policy information and the frame information was randomized, while the policy and

frame information section was always presented last.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two policy conditions. In the moderately

progressive policy conditions, participants learned that Scott Miller supported four relatively

moderate progressive policies: setting up an infrastructure program with 200,000 new jobs,

maintaining the Affordable Care Act in its current form, increasing the federal minimum wage to

$9.50, and creating a parental leave program that would provide one month of paid leave for all

working mothers. In the highly progressive policy conditions, Scott Miller supported setting up

an infrastructure program with 5,000,000 new jobs, expanding Medicare to cover all uninsured

Americans, increasing the minimum wage to $12.00, and creating a parental leave program that

would provide three months of paid leave for all working mothers and fathers.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four frame conditions. While the frame

information in the *control frame condition* provided participants with basic information about the

American election system, participants in the other frame conditions read excerpts from a speech

in which Scott Miller explains his political principles. For example, in the *liberal frame

condition*, participants read that Scott Miller's "vision for our country is based on principles of

economic justice, fairness, and compassion" and that he stands for "economic policies that are

based on justice and care, policies that will stop corporations from exploiting working people,

pocketing huge profits while offering their workers substandard wages and benefits." In the *conservative frame condition*, participants read that Scott Miller's "vision for America is based on respect for the values and traditions that were handed down to us: hard work, loyalty to our country, and the freedom to forge your own path" and that he believes "it is patriotic to put American families ahead of big money donors and special interests."

The section with policy and frame information depended both on the policy and frame conditions participants were assigned. While participants in the control frame condition read basic information about the American presidential nomination system, all other participants read excerpts from a speech in which how Scott Miller explained how his policy positions and principles are linked. Policy platform and value frame were manipulated independently of each other. For example, in the *moderately progressive policy – liberal frame condition*, participants read: "I support these policies because they will help reduce economic inequality and promote economic justice. My federal infrastructure plan will create 200,000 jobs, good jobs with fair pay and benefits." In the *moderately progressive policy – conservative frame condition*, participants read "I support these policies because showing respect for hard-working Americans is a sacred national tradition that I believe we must honor. My federal infrastructure plan will create 200,000 jobs, good jobs with dignity and respectable wages." In the *highly progressive policy – liberal frame condition*, participants read the same rhetoric, but the policy was changed accordingly (for example to "5,000,000 jobs" instead of "200,000 jobs"). The complete wording of all stimuli is included in Supplementary Materials.

In Part 2, we measured participants' support for, and impression of, the Democratic candidate. Our main dependent variable, *candidate support,* was measured with two items: "How much would you support or oppose Scott Miller's candidacy for president in 2020?", answered

on a slider scale from 0 (strongly oppose) to 100 (strongly support), and "How likely would you be to vote for Scott Miller for president in 2020?", answered on a slider scale from 0 (very unlikely) to 100 (very likely). The two items were averaged to form the *candidate support* composite ($r = .94$). We collected additional measures of perceptions of the candidate and indicators of support, including liking, competence, how principled he was, consistency, identification with the candidate, support for his economic platform and each policy in it, willingness to help the candidate campaigning, and intention to vote for him versus Donald Trump in the 2020 election, as well as measures of perceptions of, and support for, Donald Trump.

As a manipulation check, we measured the *perceived conservatism of the candidate's values* with the item: "To what extent do you feel Scott Miller promotes liberal or conservative values?", answered on a scale from 0 ("entirely promotes liberal values") to 100 ("entirely promotes conservative values"). As a possible mediator[5], participants' *perceived value similarity* with the candidate was assessed with the item: "To what extent do you feel Scott Miller has the same values you do?", answered on a scale from 0 ("not at all") to 100 ("a great deal"). To measure political ideology, our hypothesized moderator, participants rated their ideology on a scale from 1 ("extremely liberal") to 7 ("extremely conservative"). Since political ideology was assessed after the policy and frame manipulations, we tested whether it was predicted by frame condition, policy condition, or their interaction. All of these effects were non-significant, ps > .257. Finally, as part of a short demographic survey, participants indicated their gender, age, ethnicity, education, and income.

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[5] Perceived value similarity also functioned as a manipulation check item in Studies 1 and 2 (preregistered in Study 2). Political ideology and frame condition influenced perceived value similarity in the expected way (see Supplementary Materials for details).

Results

  Analytic strategy. We recoded all continuous dependent variables to range from 0 to 1 to make effects comparable across variables. Political ideology was recoded to range from -3 to 3 such that zero had a meaningful interpretation as ideologically moderate. We used multiple linear regression analyses to test the moral reframing hypothesis. First, we checked whether the frame manipulation worked as intended by testing its effects on perceived conservatism of the candidate's values. Next, we present the results for our main dependent variable, regressing candidate support on the interaction effect of political ideology and frame condition. In addition, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis to examine the mechanism underlying the moral reframing hypothesis, testing whether perceived value similarity with the candidate mediates the ideology x frame condition interaction. Finally, we summarize the effects of moral reframing on additional dependent variables. In all models, we controlled for policy condition, gender, ethnicity, and education (all dummy-coded) as well as age and income (both mean-centered). The same procedures were used in Study 2.

  Manipulation check: Perceived conservatism of the candidate's values. As expected, we found that the candidate's values were perceived as significantly more conservative in the conservative frame condition than in the control condition, $b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2426) = 8.60$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.09, 0.14]$. Additionally, the candidate's values were perceived to be significantly less conservative (i.e. more liberal) in the liberal frame condition than in the control condition, $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2426) = -4.17$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [-0.08, -0.03]$. Although there were significant interaction effects (for details see Supplementary Materials), we found the same pattern for all ideological groups: conservative, moderate, and liberal participants perceived the candidate's values to be significantly more conservative in the conservative frame

condition than in the control condition and significantly less conservative in the liberal frame condition than in the control condition. Overall, these results indicate that our manipulations of liberal and conservative value frames were successful.

Main dependent variable: Candidate support. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 2, Column 2. The predicted political ideology x frame condition interaction effect was significant, $F(3, 2423) = 10.08$, $p < .001$, R^2 increase = .01. Simple effect analyses were conducted to probe the effect of the different frame conditions for liberals (ideology = -2), moderates (ideology = 0), and conservatives (ideology = 2) within the model with the interaction effect. We used these concrete scale points for follow-up analyses of the interaction effect because these scale points are more readily interpretable for political ideology than one standard deviation above or below the mean. The results are illustrated in Figure 1.
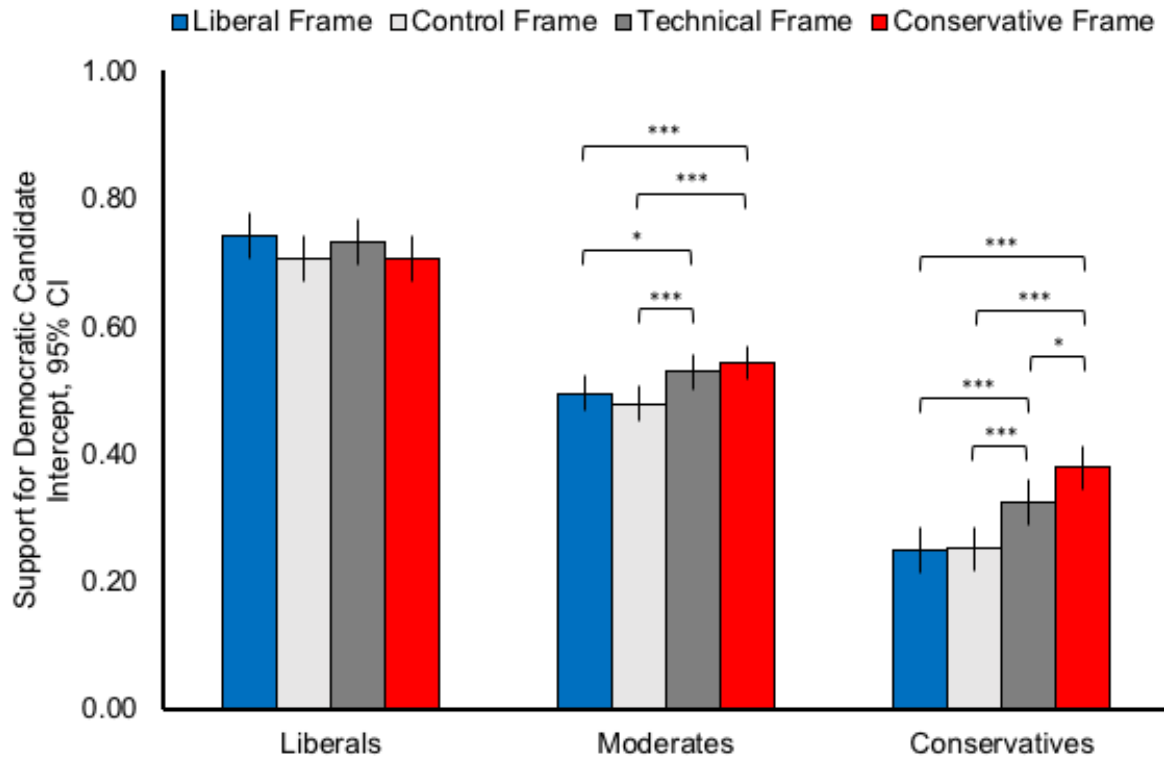
These analyses indicate that conservative value framing increased candidate support. Conservative participants supported the candidate significantly more in the conservative frame condition than in either the liberal frame condition, $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(2423) = 6.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.09, 0.17]$, or the control frame condition, $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(2423) = 6.02$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.09, 0.17]$. There was no significant difference between the liberal frame condition and the control frame condition among conservatives, $b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(2423) = -0.11$, $p = .913$, 95% CI for $b = [-0.04, 0.04]$.

Parallel analyses for moderates yielded similar though somewhat weaker effects. Moderate participants supported the candidate significantly more in the conservative frame condition than in either the liberal frame condition, $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2423) = 3.41$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.02, 0.07]$, or the control frame condition, $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2423) = 4.58$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.04, 0.09]$. There was no significant difference between the liberal

Table 2: *The Unstandardized Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for the Effects of Political Ideology and Frame Condition on Candidate Support in Study 1*

	Main Effects Model b (SE)	Moral Reframing Model b (SE)
Intercept	0.50 (0.01)	0.49 (0.01)
Political Ideology	-0.11 (0.00)	-0.12 (0.01)
Policy Condition		
Moderately Progressive	Reference Category	Reference Category
Highly Progressive	0.04 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)
Frame Condition		
Liberal	Reference Category	Reference Category
Control	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Conservative	0.05 (0.01)	0.05 (0.01)
Technical	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)
Political Ideology x Frame Condition		
Political Ideology x Liberal	Reference Category	Reference Category
Political Ideology x Control	-	0.01 (0.01)
Political Ideology x Conservative	-	0.04 (0.01)
Political Ideology x Technical	-	0.02 (0.01)
Gender		
Male	Reference Category	Reference Category
Female	0.05 (0.01)	0.05 (0.01)
Other	0.10 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)
Age (mean-centered)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Ethnicity		
White	Reference Category	Reference Category
Black	0.09 (0.02)	0.10 (0.02)
Hispanic	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Asian	0.05 (0.02)	0.05 (0.02)
Other	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)
Education		
Bachelor's degree	Reference Category	Reference Category
No college	0.08 (0.02)	0.08 (0.02)
Some college	0.03 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Postgraduate	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
Income (mean-centered)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Adjusted R^2	0.42	0.43
Sample size (n)	2443	2443

Figure 1: *The Unstandardized Regression Intercepts and 95 % Confidence Intervals for*

Candidate Support in the Four Frame Conditions Dependent on Political Ideology in Study 1

Notes. Regression intercepts were estimated for the following values of the control variables: gender: male, age: mean age, ethnicity: white, education: Bachelor's degree, income: mean income.

frame condition and the control frame condition among moderates, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2423) = 1.18$, $p = .240$, 95% CI for $b = [-0.01, 0.04]$.

Analogous analyses among liberal participants yielded no significant differences between the three conditions, all $|b|s < 0.04$, all $SEs = 0.02$, all $|t(2423)|s < 1.73$, all $ps > .084$. Furthermore, we found no evidence that the frame condition interacted with the policy manipulation. All interaction effects involving policy condition were non-significant, $ps > .211$. However, we found a significant main effect of policy condition indicating that participants in the highly progressive policy condition supported the candidate more than participants in the

moderately progressive policy condition, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2423) = 4.21$, $p < .001$, 95% CI

for $b = [0.02, 0.06]$. Taken together, these results support the moral reframing

hypothesis.[6]Notably, the effect sizes were considerable. Although the increase in explained

variance by the moral reframing interaction was relatively small, conservative value framing – as

opposed to liberal value framing – resulted, on average, in a 13-point increase of support on a

scale from 0 to 100 among conservatives.

      We also tested whether moral reframing resulted in increased candidate support in the

full sample. In a main-effects-only model (cf. Table 2, Column 1), we found that participants

supported the candidate significantly more in the conservative frame condition than in either the

liberal frame condition, $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2426) = 3.26$, $p = .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.02,$

$0.07]$, or the control frame condition, $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2426) = 4.52$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for b

$= [0.04, 0.09]$. There was no significant difference between the liberal frame condition and the

control frame condition, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(2426) = 1.27$, $p = .206$, 95% CI for $b = [-0.01,$

$0.04]$. These results suggest that conservative framing increases the overall support for

progressive candidates in the study sample.

      Moderated mediation analysis. We next tested whether the differences in candidate

support between the frame conditions were driven by differences in perceived value similarity

with the candidate. A bias-corrected bootstrap estimation approach with 5,000 samples was used

to estimate the indirect effects. Among conservative participants, the increase in candidate

support in the conservative frame condition was mediated by perceived value similarity. The

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[6] In Supplementary Materials, we detail several additional checks we conducted to ensure the robustness of our findings, including bootstrapping regression coefficients to account for violations of standard regression assumptions, excluding participants in the technical frame condition from the analysis, and using the measure of political ideology participants indicated in a prescreen survey instead of the post-manipulation measure of political ideology we collected in the current survey. The results reported above are robust to all of these checks.

95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the liberal frame condition did not include zero, $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.17], nor did the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the control frame condition, $b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.11, 0.19]. Among moderate participants, the effect of the conservative frame was also mediated by perceived value similarity. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the liberal frame condition did not include zero, $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.06], nor did the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the control frame condition, $b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.10]. Notably, the liberal frame condition also increased support for the candidate indirectly via perceived value similarity among moderate participants. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the liberal frame condition and the control frame condition did not include zero, $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.07]. Among liberal participants, the liberal frame condition increased support for the candidate indirectly via perceived value similarity. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the liberal frame condition and the conservative frame condition did not include zero, $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.09], nor did the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the liberal frame condition and the control frame condition, $b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.10]. These results suggest that perceived value similarity between voter and candidate largely accounts for the moral reframing effect.

Other dependent variables. The moral reframing effect was obtained for other perceptions of the progressive candidate and indicators of support as well. Specifically,

conservative participants in the conservative frame condition liked the candidate more, perceived him to be more competent, identified with him more, and supported his economic platform more, compared to conservative participants in either the liberal frame condition or the control frame conditions. Similar effects, though lower magnitude, were found among moderate participants. Conservative (but not moderate) participants in the conservative frame condition also perceived the candidate to be more principled and were more willing to help the candidate campaign and more likely to intend to vote for him versus Donald Trump in the 2020 election. The latter effect was likely driven by increased support for the Democratic candidate since perceptions and indicators of support for Trump were unaffected by the frame manipulation. Importantly, there was no significant difference in the perceived "consistency" of the Democratic candidate between the conservative frame condition and the liberal frame condition, suggesting that fitting progressive policies with conservative value concerns did not lead to a perception of the progressive candidate as incoherent or hypocritical. More details on these additional analyses can be found in Supplementary Materials.

Discussion

This study provided initial support for the moral reframing hypothesis. Despite salient party cues, conservative value framing increased support for an advocate of progressive policies among conservatives. The conservative frame also led to unanticipated gains among moderates. Furthermore, we found this effect was mediated by perceived value similarity. Importantly, comparisons with a neutral control condition indicate that these effects were positive effects of the conservative frame rather than negative effects of the liberal frame.

Study 2

Although the first study found strong support for the moral reframing hypothesis, like most prior moral reframing studies, it was conducted on a non-representative, convenience sample. Given that the ability to generalize to the American population is an important consideration in studies of public opinion dynamics, the second study aimed to directly replicate the results of Study 1 with a preregistered experiment on a nationally representative sample.

Method

Preregistration. The determination of the sample size via a priori power analyses, data exclusion procedures, central hypotheses, recoding of independent and dependent variables, and the statistical models for the test on our main dependent variable were all preregistered.[7] Based on methodological research on the drawbacks of weights for significant testing (Winship & Radbill, 1994), our preregistered analysis script specified that we would use unweighted regression analyses for hypothesis testing. However, we conducted robustness checks including weights that are reported in Supplementary Materials.

Participants. We recruited a general population sample of U.S. adults age 18 years and older from NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel for this study. AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households were sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. For samples drawn from the AmeriSpeak panel, sampling strata are used that are based on age, race/Hispanic ethnicity, education, and gender (48 sampling strata in total). Based on the exclusion rate due to comprehension checks in a pretest of 137 participants, African American and Hispanic respondents were oversampled. Sample size was determined by multiple preregistered a priori

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[7] The preregistration is accessible at https://osf.io/mbu28/?view_only=c9286310bf934d2088f4e03e15707145

power analyses and cost constraints. Based on power analyses with GPower (Faul et al., 2007) for significant tests with alpha = 0.05, we estimated that we would need a sample size of $n =$ 1650 to achieve at least 92% power for detecting each of the hypothesized effects. Our initial sample size consisted of 2612 participants which included participants from both a small pretest and the full sample. After excluding 193 participants due to doubled ids or doubled IP addresses (keeping only the first cases), 402 participants due to missing values, and 322 participants due to failed comprehension checks, we obtained a final sample of 1695 participants which, as preregistered, includes the pretest participants. According to post hoc power analyses, this sample size results in 93% power to detect the interaction effect predicted by the moral reframing hypothesis, assumed to be small in size ($f = .1$). Demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 1.

Design, Procedure, and Measures. The design, procedure, and measures paralleled that of Study 1, except that the study was shortened to reduce the cost. Regarding the design, we dropped the control frame condition, resulting in a 2 (policy condition: moderately progressive versus highly progressive) x 3 (frame condition: liberal versus conservative versus technical), between-subjects design. We retained only the most relevant dependent variables (candidate support ($r = .94$), willingness to help campaigning, identification with the candidate, support for the candidate's economic platform, and intention to vote for the candidate versus Donald Trump in the 2020 election), political ideology as a hypothesized moderator, and perceived value similarity as a possible mediator. In addition to the frame manipulation check (reworded to "How liberal or conservative are Scott Miller's values?"), we added a policy manipulation check ("How liberal or conservative are Scott Miller's policies?"). Both were answered on scales from 0 (extremely liberal) to 100 (extremely conservative). NORC provided demographic information

for each panel member (gender, age, ethnicity, education, and income). Since political ideology was assessed after the policy and frame manipulations, we tested whether it was predicted by frame condition, policy condition, or their interaction. All of these effects were non-significant, ps > .254.

Results

       Manipulation checks: Perceived conservatism of the candidate's values and policies. As expected, we found that the candidate's values were perceived to be significantly more conservative in the conservative frame condition than in the liberal frame condition, $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(1679) = 8.98$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.09, 0.15]$. All interaction effects involving policy condition and frame condition as well as the main effect of policy condition were non-significant, ps > .354. This result suggests that our manipulations of liberal and conservative value frames were successful.

       We also found that the candidate's policies were perceived to be significantly more conservative in the moderately progressive policy conditions than in the highly progressive policy conditions, $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(1679) = 2.16$, $p = .031$, 95% CI for $b = [0.00, 0.04]$. Interestingly, the candidate's policies were also perceived to be significantly more conservative in the conservative frame conditions than in the liberal frame conditions, $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(1679) = 6.50$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.06, 0.11]$. All interaction effects involving policy condition and frame condition were non-significant, ps > .362. These results indicate that our manipulation of highly progressive versus moderately progressive policies was successful and that participants used the value framing as a cue to categorize both the candidate's values and policies.

Main dependent variable: Candidate support. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 3, Column 2. The predicted political ideology x frame condition interaction effect was significant, $F(2, 1677) = 7.23$, $p < .001$, R^2 increase = .01. The results of the simple effect analyses are illustrated in Figure 2. These analyses indicate that conservative participants supported the candidate significantly more in the conservative frame condition than in the liberal frame condition, $b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(1677) = 4.36$, $p < .001$, 95% CI for $b = [0.06, 0.15]$. Parallel analyses for moderates yielded a similar but weaker effect, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(1677) = 2.54$, $p = .011$, 95% CI for $b = [0.01, 0.07]$. Analogous analyses among liberals yielded no significant difference between the conservative and the liberal frame conditions, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(1677) = -1.11$, $p = .269$, 95% CI for $b = [-0.07, 0.02]$. We did not find evidence that the effect of the frame condition interacted with the policy manipulation. All interaction effects involving policy condition were non-significant, all ps > .914. In contrast to Study 1, the main effect of policy condition was non-significant, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $t(1677) = 0.94$, $p = .346$, 95% CI for $b = [-0.01, 0.04]$. While the increase in explained variance by the moral reframing interaction was relatively small, the effect size of the simple effect among conservatives was meaningful. Conservative value framing resulted, on average, in a 10-point increase in support on a scale from 0 to 100 among conservatives. These results replicate the findings in support of the moral reframing hypothesis found in Study 1.[8]
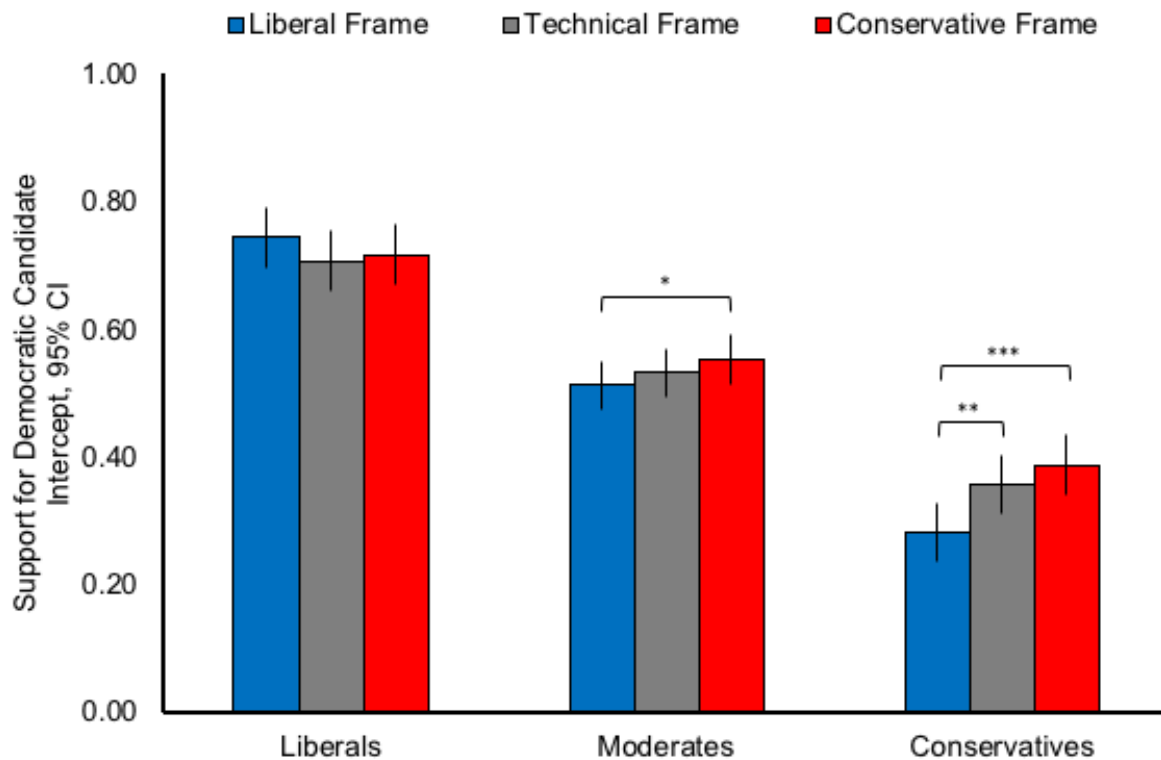
Notably, the moral reframing effect also resulted in increased candidate support across our full sample. In a main-effects-only model (cf. Table 3, Column 1), we found that participants

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[8] In Supplementary Materials, we detail several additional checks we conducted to ensure the robustness of our findings, including bootstrapping regression coefficients to account for violations of standard regression assumptions, excluding participants in the technical frame condition from analysis, and excluding participants from the pretest. The results reported above are robust to all of these checks. We also conducted several robustness checks using weights. Overall, these analyses indicate results in the same direction but with lower effect sizes.

Table 3: *The Unstandardized Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors for the Effects of Political Ideology and Frame Condition on Candidate Support in Study 2*

	Main Effects Model b (*SE*)	Moral Reframing Model b (*SE*)
Intercept	0.51 (0.02)	0.51 (0.02)
Political Ideology	-0.10 (0.00)	-0.12 (0.01)
Policy Condition		
Moderately Progressive	Reference Category	Reference Category
Highly Progressive	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Frame Condition		
Liberal	Reference Category	Reference Category
Conservative	0.04 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)
Technical	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Political Ideology x Frame Condition		
Political Ideology x Liberal	Reference Category	Reference Category
Political Ideology x Conservative	-	0.03 (0.01)
Political Ideology x Technical	-	0.03 (0.01)
Gender		
Male	Reference Category	Reference Category
Female	0.08 (0.01)	0.08 (0.01)
Age (mean-centered)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Ethnicity		
White	Reference Category	Reference Category
Black	0.14 (0.02)	0.14 (0.02)
Hispanic	0.06 (0.02)	0.06 (0.02)
Asian	0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)
Multiple	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)
Other	0.08 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)
Education		
Bachelor's degree	Reference Category	Reference Category
No college	0.05 (0.02)	0.05 (0.02)
Some college	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Postgraduate	0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Income (mean-centered)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)
Adjusted R^2	0.32	0.33
Sample size (*n*)	1695	1695

Figure 2: *The Unstandardized Regression Intercepts and 95 % Confidence Intervals for*

Candidate Support in the Three Frame Conditions Dependent on Political Ideology in Study 2

Notes. Regression intercepts were estimated for the following values of the control variables: gender: male, age:

mean age, ethnicity: white, education: Bachelor's degree, income: mean income.

supported the candidate significantly more in the conservative frame condition than in the liberal

frame condition, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(1679) = 2.55$, $p = .011$, 95% CI for b = [0.01, 0.07].

Moderated mediation analysis. As in Study 1, perceived value similarity mediated the

moral reframing effect for conservatives and moderates. For conservatives, the 95% confidence

interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the

liberal frame condition did not include zero, $b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.19].

Similarly, for moderates, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the liberal frame condition did not include zero, $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.08]. In contrast, there was no significant indirect effect via perceived value similarity among liberals. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect for the comparison of the conservative frame condition and the liberal frame condition included zero, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [-0.07, 0.00]. Overall, these analyses support the mediating role of perceived value similarity.

Other dependent variables. The moral reframing effect extended to other important indicators of candidate support. Conservative participants in the conservative frame condition were more willing to help the candidate campaign, identified more with the candidate, and supported his economic platform more compared to conservative participants in the liberal frame condition. Similar, though smaller, effects were found among moderate participants. In addition, although the ideology x frame condition interaction effect was not significant for the voting intention variable, a main effect of frame condition indicates that participants in the conservative frame condition were more likely to report intending to vote for the candidate in an election against Donald Trump, compared to participants in the liberal frame condition. More details on these additional analyses can be found in Supplementary Materials. Overall, these analyses replicate the findings of Study 1 suggesting that conservative value framing increases conservatives' support for a progressive candidate on a variety of measures.

Discussion

This study replicates the findings from Study 1 in support of the moral reframing hypothesis. Once again, we found that the increase in candidate support was also found for moderates and was mediated by perceived value similarity. In contrast to most prior research on

moral reframing, our results were obtained on a nationally representative sample. This makes the results generalizable to the American population.

General Discussion

Americans support many core progressive economic policies at high levels, yet rarely elect progressive candidates, a paradox widely discussed in academic and popular literature. The current research suggests that conservative value framing is one way to resolve this progressive paradox. We find consistently that when progressive candidates frame their policies as consistent with conservative, as opposed to liberal, values, they receive greater support from conservatives and moderates. Notably, there was no backlash to conservative framing among liberal participants. Thus, overall, these results suggest that the most successful candidate in our research advocated for progressive policies in terms of conservative value concerns. While typically viewed as in tension, this research suggests progressive policies and conservative value concerns are reconcilable in practice, and that such a combination can be persuasive. To this point, participants in Study 1 rated a progressive candidate with conservative value concerns as similarly "consistent" as a progressive candidate with liberal values. Taken together, these findings suggest that the moral and ideological underpinnings of policies and candidates are more malleable than commonly assumed.

Our studies were rigorous tests of the moral reframing hypothesis. The first study was highly powered, included a manipulation of policy platform across which we obtained consistent results, and included party cues that usually reduce persuasion effects. The second study maintained all of these features and was conducted on a nationally representative survey with pre-registered hypotheses and procedures. Nonetheless, future research is needed to replicate the current results in settings featuring counter-arguments, temporally closer to elections (Kalla &

Broockman, 2018), and ideally in the context of real political campaigns. Another interesting avenue for future research is the comparison of value cues and policy cues. Our results suggest that value cues might be more influential than policy cues (see Cohen, 2003, for a similar argument comparing party cues and policy cues). This suggests that moral reframing may offer a more effective path to building political consensus than policy compromise. Another promising future direction would be to study the effect of moral reframing on other factors that influence candidate support. For example, in Studies 1 and 2 we tested whether conservative framing would reduce the effect of racial resentment on candidate support. Here we found suggestive, but as yet inconclusive, results (see Supplementary Materials for more information) that merit further attention.

It would be irresponsible not to note that, while we found evidence that the framing technique we tested here was effective, this does not mean that its use is necessarily socially desirable. For example, one can readily identify a number of oppressive dictatorships that sought to ideologically link conservative moral values such as loyalty and purity with redistributive economic policy agendas, with disastrous effect. It is important to emphasize that, as with any effective political tool, the ethical value of moral reframing depends critically on the ends to which it is put.

Acknowledgement

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