All Frames Are Not Equal: Framing and Conflict Displacement *

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Abstract

Issue framing affects individual opinions, mass sentiment, and policy. While most frames reinforce the status quo distribution of opinion, occasionally frames redraw the line of debate. These "conflict-displacing" frames are distinctive because of what they ask, and most importantly what they do not ask, of opponents. Whereas "conflict-reinforcing" frames generate significant cognitive dissonance for opponents, conflict-displacing frames ask opponents to incorporate new information into their decision calculus *without* needing to admit error in previous judgment. We demonstrate the destabilizing power of these frames through an experimental investigation of framing and capital punishment. We show that all frames are not equal.

Politicians argue. They argue to advance policy goals. Whether they want to reform social security, commit troops abroad, or cut taxes, they know that framing policy in a particular light is often the only viable way to gain support. Whether debate over troop deployment focuses on shoring up peace or the number of American soldiers killed in action affects support for the policy, for example. More generally, advocates search for the best frame, or argument, that demonstrates that a given policy goal is to be supported. Opponents respond with counter-attacks presenting flaws in the argument, evidence that facts do not support the case, or a countervailing frame. This competition in public debate holds most issues in check most of the time, so that they deviate little from how they were understood in previous discussions. But from time to time, we observe dramatic change in how a policy is framed, or collectively understood by policy makers, citizens, and media alike. Under these conditions, there is a potential for significant policy change.

In the first half of the 20th century, stories about pesticides emphasized the positive contribution of these new chemical products to agriculture's "green revolution", which was expected to end world hunger, potentially eradicate all such diseases as malaria, and foster various other manifestations of scientific progress. In fact, from 1900 to 1956, the average annual percentage of stories dealing with the industry in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* with a positive tone was over 90. An abrupt shift occurred in 1957 when the percentage positive shifted from 78 to 36 in a single year, and attention stayed focused on the negative aspects for the next generation; on average only 20 percent of the stories were positive from 1957 to 1990. The debate shifted to elements of environmental danger: toxic waste, birth defects among animals, threats to endangered species, farmers' dependence on monoculture, and expensive fertilizer and pesticides applications. In contrast to the promising beginnings for the industry, the public image of pesticides never recovered from the dramatic, permanent, and rapid shift of the public image that took place in 1957.

The case of pesticides is not uncommon; many issues have seen their frames shift in dramatic and lasting ways. Smoking, nuclear power, welfare, any number of public policies can be cited that illustrate the possibility of dramatic shifts in public frames (Baumgartner & Jones 1993). These frames influence how citizens think about an issue (Baumgartner & Jones 1993, Chong 1996, Fine 1992, Jacoby 2000, Nelson & Kinder 1996, Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997*a*, Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997*b*, Nelson & Oxley 1999, Pollock 1994, Terkildsen & Schnell 1997, Tversky & Kahneman 1986) and these changing understandings, in turn, can affect public policy (Baumgartner 1989, Baumgartner &

Jones 1993, Baumgartner & Jones 2002, Kellstedt 2000, Schneider & Ingram 1993, Stimson, MacKuen & Erikson 1995). How do changes in spin in these cases differ from "politics as usual"?

Consider that at a basic level, proposing a frame is like trying to sell a product. And what makes a product sell? We point to three elements: the skill and credibility of the salesman, the predispositions of the buyer, and the product itself. Politicians and policy advocates, as salesmen, display varying levels of skill and credibility in promoting a given frame (Druckman 2001, Druckman & Nelson 2003, Nelson & Kinder 1996, Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997*a*). Citizens, for their part, are exposed to frames not as blank slates but with their predispositions (Berinsky & Kinder 2000, Brewer 2000, Federico 2001, Gross 2000, Haider-Markel & Joslyn 2001, Iyengar 1991, Shah, Domke & Wackman 1996), varying degrees of interest and knowledge (Haider-Markel & Joslyn 2001, Iyengar 1991, Kinder & Sanders 1990, Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997*b*), and varying levels of attentiveness (Price & Na 2000). Each of these features of the framer and the audience affects the resonance of frames among individuals, and their importance has been well documented. Ironically, the quality of the product itself, the frame, has received relatively little attention.

Researchers have documented the rise to dominance of one frame over competing frames in single issues debates (Baumgartner & Jones 1993, Stone 1988), but we lack a theory of framing that explains and predicts the class of frames most likely to find success across a wide range of issues and, in particular, individual-level cognitive response to different frames. We identify an important feature of frame type and show how it affects how citizens think about politics. Some frames, we will demonstrate, are old, familiar, and relatively ineffective; they may motivate supporters but are unlikely to convince opponents. We refer to these as "conflict-reinforcing" frames because they reinforce divisions already present in the distribution of opinion, supporting the status quo. These frames stand little chance of destabilizing opinion. Others, which we will call "conflict-displacing" frames, are potentially more appealing to opponents and therefore have the potential to change the structure of a debate. These frames work by structuring the alternatives in a new way, thereby eliciting a cognitive response that moves an individual away from her or his established way of thinking of the issue. In the pesticide and other examples cited above, analysts find that the new frame is not directly contradictory to the old one; in fact, rather than dispute the particular advantages espoused by proponents of the old frame, the new frame simply focuses attention on a different set of questions. Tobacco opponents focus on health; proponents, on jobs. Spin matters, as these examples make clear. But it is not just "spin."

Complex issues of public policy involve multiple dimensions of potential evaluation. New frames that redirect attention to different dimensions can be more effective than those that focus on a dimension already prevalent in the debate.

As we will show, the most important differences between the two types of frames are not how their supporters respond to them, but rather what reactions the arguments elicit from opponents. Conflict-reinforcing frames promote strong cognitive dissonance among opponents; they may be quite convincing to supporters but they are of little value in gaining new recruits. In order for opponents to accept conflict-reinforcing frames they must essentially admit that their previous opinions were mistaken; naturally, cognitive mechanisms are plentiful that cause resistance to that. Conflict-displacing frames work around this by proposing a new dimension of evaluation that does not require individuals to re-evaluate their previous opinions on the issue; rather these frames bring up new dimensions of debate to which individuals may have no reason to object. Thus, some frames are much more effective because of what they ask, and more importantly what they do not ask, of opponents. In comparing the effects of these two types of frames, we show that all frames are not equal.

Policy changes cannot come about, and public opinion is unlikely to change, as long as conflict-reinforcing frames predominate. The rise of conflict-displacing frames is a major cause of policy change. We demonstrate these ideas with experimental evidence on how individuals react to diverse arguments relating to the death penalty. The death penalty is an important issue but our theory is generalizable. As we define them, conflict-reinforcing and conflict-displacing frames have played the primary pivotal roles in agenda setting and issue evolution across U.S. history.

With a focus on successful use of frames, and with an interest in the power of "spin doctors" to manipulate almost anything, one could be left with the impression that framing is all that matters. But this is far from the case. We know that displacing conflict is the key element in reframing a public policy debate (Schattschneider 1960, Riker 1986). While the goal of policy advocates is to redraw the lines of conflict so as to be in the majority, this is easier said than done. Opponents of the dominant policy position are motivated to identify conflict-displacing frames, but a majority typically benefits from and supports the conflict-reinforcing frame. So to say all frames are not equal works two ways—some frames reinforce the established cleavage and others displace it. In the struggle over how to understand a policy debate, there is no guarantee that the forces supporting a conflict-displacing frame will be stronger than those supporting the conflict-reinforcing frame. Our interest here, however,

is to demonstrate first that we can distinguish between these two types of frames and second to show that they have different effects on different groups of people. Conflict-reinforcing frames are virtually useless in attracting new supporters. Conflict-displacing frames offer the possibility of doing so.

We show experimental evidence clearly indicating the greater openness of those predisposed against a policy to conflict-displacing frames rather than to conflict-reinforcing ones. Conflict-reinforcing arguments lead people predisposed against them to counter-argue and "hold fast", even if the arguments are quite convincing to those predisposed in favor. Conflict-displacing frames, on the other hand, positively affect the cognitive response of those predisposed in favor as well as those predisposed against a policy. Our research moves the study of framing to a new level of analysis by focusing on individual cognitive response to new arguments and fits into a long and rich psychological literature on framing and cognitive processes at the individual level.

The Case of the Death Penalty

Recently, public discourse on capital punishment has centered around a frame pointing to inevitable imperfections in a justice system administered by humans. No matter what one thinks about the morality of the death penalty, the new argument goes, can we be sure no mistakes are made? This "innocence frame" disrupts competing divisions of conflict, all based on the assumption of guilt and focused on the morality of death as a criminal punishment. Since 1973, 119 people have been released from death row in the U.S.; almost 4,000 are currently on death row. Where the standard of "reasonable doubt" has long been accepted for criminal convictions, critics argue it should be closer to absolute certainty in the case of executions; errors in the process cannot be corrected after the fact. The new innocence argument is a prime example of a conflict-displacing frame, one that has already come to dominate public debate on the topic (Baumgartner, DeBoef & Boydstun 2004).

Opponents of the death penalty have successfully raised a new element of debate: In a justice system administering hundreds of cases each year, can we be certain no mistakes are made? This new issue avoids the "old" morality frame. Most importantly the innocence frame does not ask those who believe in the moral righteousness of the death penalty to change their opinion on that dimension. Rather, it asks them to look at the issue from a new perspective. This new dimension could upend the debate and generate a strong consensus against the death penalty, since no one is in favor of wrongful executions, and few would argue that human institutions (especially government bureaucracies) can

be expected to function with absolute perfection, avoiding a single error while making thousands of decisions. In fact counter arguments to this frame have seldom surfaced in public debate.[1]

We build upon the two classic death-penalty experiments by Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) and Edwards and Smith (1996) by examining in finer detail how individuals respond to messages that are either consistent or inconsistent with their prior beliefs about the death penalty. We expose individuals to newspaper stories presenting one of several frames (a moral frame supporting the death penalty; a moral frame in opposition; the "innocence frame;" and a control) and then ask subjects to offer their own arguments about the death penalty. We examine the dimension and valence as well as the total number of arguments offered to assess whether the subject adopted the *dimension* of the frame to which she was exposed, reacting to a morality frame with a morality argument or an innocence frame with an innocence argument, and whether the subject adopted the *valence* of the frame to which she was exposed (pro-death penalty or anti-death penalty). In particular, we look at how those subjects who agree and disagree with the statement responded to it (based on subjects' expressed opinions about the death penalty). Taking into account the content of information as well as the opinions of those subject to the stimulus provides greater insight into psychological reactions to messages, relative to investigation of the simple valence of the information as conceptualized in prior studies.

We find strong support for our hypotheses and show how different frames elicit different responses among death penalty supporters compared to opponents. Most notably, we find that conflict-displacing frames are more effective than conflict-reinforcing frames at influencing how opponents to the frame's policy stance think about the issue. Whereas presentation of either morality frame serves to reinforce attitudes whether for or against the death penalty, supporters and opponents alike are receptive to the innocence frame; conflict-displacing frames wield a special buying power that conflict-reinforcing frames do not share.

Framing and Cognition

According to Gamson and Modigliani (1987), a frame is "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them.... The frame suggests what the controversy is, [offering information] about the essence of the issue" (p. 143). Framing is thus the process by which politicians and journalists jockey to highlight certain aspects of issues or events in an effort to simplify them or connect them with the larger political world.

Prior research has indicated that framing in many forms, and media framing in particular, can have the potential to influence what individuals take into consideration in forming opinions and making decisions on ambivalent and controversial issues (Domke, Shah & Wackman 1998, Iyengar 1991, Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997*a*). Scholars have found, for example, that a Ku Klux Klan rally can be framed as either a racist provocation or an exercise of free speech rights. Different frames lead to different interpretations and levels of tolerance of the rally (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley 1997*a*). Similarly, Iyengar (1991) shows that framing an issue episodically (focusing on individual cases), rather than thematically (focusing on broader social contexts), encourages people to blame poverty on individuals, whereas thematic frames encourage people to blame poverty on the government or the system.

Research on accessibility in social cognitive psychology provides some insights into how and why framing works. Scholars have defined accessibility as the readiness with which stored knowledge or constructs can be activated (Fazio 1995, Higgins 1996). Accessible constructs have low activation thresholds, and can be easily activated by a given stimulus and subsequently affect evaluation of that stimulus (Higgins 1996, Wyer & Srull 1989). Scholars have long recognized that cognitive limitations force individuals to use accessible shortcuts or heuristics in processing complex information on issues such as public policy (Taylor & Fiske 1981, Zaller 1992). In other words, individuals rarely conduct a thorough search for all relevant information in forming internal attitudes or expressing opinions. Instead, they tend to form attitudes based on what is most accessible to them (Taylor & Fiske 1981).

This suggests that when the media highlights an issue in a particular way, this framing will interact with an individual's pre-existing attitude on the issue. Depending on how much cognitive dissonance the frame produces (a topic we will discuss later), an individual may incorporate the information of the frame into her or his mental framework, updating attitudes accordingly. Since opinions are expressed attitudes, and attitudes while not fixed are based on core values, a short-term framing stimulus is unlikely to affect an individual's opinion. But given the right kind of frame, even a brief stimulus can have an impact on how a person thinks about the issue, providing readily-accessible constructs from which he or she will draw in formulating arguments. As this cognitive sequence suggests, a shift in how an individual thinks and talks about an issue is the first step toward attitude change. Over time, with repeated exposure to a given frame, opinions may change.

Recently Jones and Baumgartner (2005) developed a model of policy change emphasizing many of these ideas. Any given issue of public policy, they note, typically has many more potential di-

mensions of evaluation than are actively considered. The architecture of human cognition precludes simultaneously considering too many dimensions of evaluation; humans can't make trade-offs in many dimensions (see also Jones 1994, Jones 2001). But since the underlying problems are more complex than consideration of them typically is, the possibility remains that previously ignored dimensions of discussion will emerge. The emergence of new dimensions of debate has the potential to destabilize status-quo policies. Individuals or organizations may resist consideration of the new dimension for some time, but if pressure is sufficient they may be forced to consider it. The result is a radical updating in policy preferences or outcomes, not a marginal or incremental adjustment. In sum, the potential impacts of reframing are great. Jones and Baumgartner develop a model of human cognition fully consistent with the literature cited here and with our study. However, their evidence focuses mostly on system-level outputs, not individual-level cognitive processes, which are our focus here.

Literature on accessibility notwithstanding, research has indicated that framing may not have universal impact on everyone. Druckman (2001) notes that individual attitudes, among other factors, can mediate framing effects. He argues that "evidence to date suggests that emphasis framing effects do not work through an automatic accessibility process" (p. 245). Therefore, Druckman advocates framing research that investigates how and why certain frames are effective relative to others and in which contexts such differences might be demonstrated. The current study attempts to shed light into exactly this type of inquiry.

Individuals bring their own mental frames, schemas, or attitudes and these color their reactions to the information presented in media messages. Researchers have found that media framing of issues in terms of values or consequences activate relevant thoughts and motivate individuals to make judgments in related terms, but these effects differed among individuals with different schemas or attitudes (Domke, Shah & Wackman 1998, Shen 2004). These findings are consistent with the schema-filtering hypothesis in social cognitive psychology, which posits that schemas and expectations serve as an organizing framework, structuring how individuals interpret new information (Fiske & Taylor 1991). Depending on the contexts, schemas have also been referred to as knowledge structures, expectancies, prototypes or mental representations (Hamilton & Sherman 1994). Rarely do individuals take in and process new information in an unbiased fashion. Instead, pre-existing attitudes or schemas facilitate the encoding and representation of consistent as compared to inconsistent information (Eagly & Chaiken 1993). That is because attitude-inconsistent information is cognitively more demanding and

difficult to process than attitude-consistent information. In particular, attitude-inconsistent stimuli produce "cognitive dissonance," the discomfort an individual feels when exposed to information or arguments inconsistent with her or his beliefs (Festinger 1957). As a result, when new information fits with pre-existing attitudes, it is relatively easier to comprehend and encode.

Along this line of reasoning, two studies investigate the influence of individuals' attitudes about the death penalty on the effectiveness of messages that either support or criticize the policy. The classic study by Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) concludes that subjects who believe that the death penalty is an effective deterrent against murder respond more favorably toward a pro-death penalty argument than toward an anti-death penalty argument, while the opposite is true for subjects who do not believe the death penalty is an effective deterrent. Not only do subjects more easily accept the argument consistent with their attitude, but they also reject and argue against messages inconsistent with their attitude, thus creating a robust polarization effect. Therefore, presenting individuals with an argument that is inconsistent with their attitude does not sway them to accept the advocated position but causes a boomerang effect in which they become more rooted in their policy viewpoint.

Expanding on this study, Edwards and Smith (1996) manipulate pro- and anti-death-penalty argumentation to explain the psychological process that accounts for such polarization effects. Resonant with the schema-based research described above, the authors suggest that individuals tend to accept at face value arguments that are consistent with their own beliefs but, when presented with arguments that are inconsistent with their attitudes, they will scrutinize the information by undergoing a deliberative memory search to undermine, and ultimately to counter-argue against, the information. Edwards and Smith find that people generate more (and more refutational) thoughts in response to an attitude-inconsistent argument versus an attitude-consistent argument, and that this is especially true in people who have high emotional conviction on the topic. We build on these studies by noting the difference between "conflict-reinforcing" and "conflict-displacing" frames. Previous studies did not manipulate the frame; we hold that such manipulation is crucial to understand the framing process. Individual cognitive responses should be affected both by pre-existing attitudes and the type of frame presented.

A Model of Cognitive Response to New Frames

At the core of our understanding of individual cognitive response to issue framing is a deceptively simple idea. On any complex issue individual attitudes are based on only a subset of the relevant dimensions of evaluation. Getting a person to revise an attitude on the basis of the dimensions already seriously considered is difficult, since it requires the person essentially to admit a previous mistake in judgment or that new information is so important that it tips the scales. This is very unlikely in many cases and especially in a debate based on morality, as capital punishment. Yet sometimes individuals are presented with an argument that compels them to change the way they think about an issue. Such arguments, we contend, operate by calling attention to a new or previously under-weighted dimension of the issue. These frames do not require individuals to abandon their beliefs about the status quo dimension of an issue, but by shifting emphasis to a new dimension they encourage individuals to begin thinking and talking about the issue in a new way.

Cognitive Response to Conflict-Reinforcing Frames

Consider an individual presented with two types of arguments. In one, both sides stick to the same dimension of consideration. Proponents of free trade, for example, argue that the policy will generate more jobs; opponents argue that more jobs will be lost than gained, or that jobs will be lost in a particular area and that any other gains are mere speculation. The point is that both sides of the debate frame the issue along the primary, or "first" dimension (jobs). Jane Doe, reading the morning paper, makes her evaluation about who has the facts straight or about which jobs she cares more about. The evidence presented, and her faith in it, become the basis for evaluation.

At a cognitive level Jane's reaction to the evidence in these conflict-reinforcing frames depends on whether the frame is consistent or inconsistent with her attitude. Assume Jane is opposed to free trade. She is thus amenable to an argument along the first dimension consistent with her belief that jobs will be lost by free trade. When exposed to this frame she is unlikely to change her attitude. In contrast, when Jane encounters an argument emphasizing the jobs that will be created by free trade, she will experience cognitive dissonance. She has three options for alleviating this dissonance: 1) counter-argue against the offensive frame, 2) ignore it, or 3) accept it. Since the debate offers no shortage of arguments in support of Jane's attitude against free trade, her reaction will likely be

to ignore or counter-argue against it, arguing that in fact more jobs will be lost than gained. The evidence would have to be strong to make her accept this frame; she is predisposed to resist.

Cognitive Response to Conflict-Displacing Frames

Now consider Jane's reaction to a second type of argument, in which one of the two sides employs what Baumgartner and Jones (1993) call "non-contradictory argumentation." Rather than arguing on the opponent's terms, this strategy involves changing the terms of debate by switching the focus of discussion to a second dimension using conflict-displacing frames. These frames advance a policy position not by locking horns with the opposition across a given line of debate, but by redrawing the line itself. If one side says that free trade will generate lost jobs, the other says that it will produce lower consumer costs, help promote democratic reform in China, or something entirely unrelated to the original dimension. This strategy is potentially destabilizing because adding a second dimension of consideration to the decision calculus fundamentally alters how people think about an issue.

As with conflict-reinforcing frames, cognitive response to conflict-displacing frames is conditional on attitude. Exposed to a new argument along the second dimension consistent with her attitude, such as the argument that free trade is culturally destructive or that it inequitably favors rich countries, Jane simply adds these arguments to the arsenal of reasons she uses to support her position. Asked to give arguments of her own regarding free trade, she will likely make use of the language and information she encountered in the new frame to argue against free trade.

In contrast, a new argument that challenges rather than reinforces Jane's attitude will produce cognitive dissonance. But unlike the case of conflict-reinforcing frames discussed above, the new information is from a second dimension. Jane will likely look around for counter arguments to combat the frame, perhaps along the new dimension it presents. If such counter arguments are readily available along this second dimension, or if this second dimension simply doesn't hold as much weight for Jane as the original dimension of debate, she will counter-argue.

But what if Jane recognizes that the new dimension is more important than she previously realized? Or what if no counter arguments come to mind along this new dimension? In these cases, we argue that Jane will be more likely to think and talk about the issue using the language of the new dimension, perhaps even adopting the valence of its arguments in some of her own. This is the first step in a cognitive process that, if strong enough, could lead Jane to change her attitude on the issue, an outcome

that was highly unlikely with the conflict-reinforcing frame discussed above. If Jane has a hard time coming up with an argument to counter the benefits of free trade with respect to democracy in China, or if she values democratic reform over job retention, she may use the new democracy argument herself, even if her net policy stance or attitude has not (yet) shifted. The key is that the conflict-displacing frame does not ask Jane to rethink her belief that free trade will cost jobs. Rather it asks her to weigh the jobs dimension against a second dimension. There is no guarantee that she will change her attitude after doing so, but she is likely to be more open to consider the new dimension.

The cognitive process individuals follow when presented with conflict-displacing frames is different from that followed when presented with conflict-reinforcing frames because the alternatives a person is asked to evaluate are different. Conflict-displacing frames provide arguments along a new dimension, encouraging new ways of thinking about an issue. Individuals need not ignore or reject their beliefs nor admit a mistake in their previous evaluation of the issue. Conflict-displacing frames broaden considerations and can often induce shifts in both the *dimension* on which citizens evaluate an issue and the *valence* of the arguments they offer regarding that issue. As such, from a policy advocate's perspective the critical distinction between conflict-reinforcing frames and conflict-displacing frames is that conflict-displacing frames offer the potential to shift the way in which *opponents* think about an issue.

Cognition and the Death Penalty

The death penalty is an old familiar debate in which the dominant division of conflict is moral, centered on core values regarding the sanctity of life and the appropriateness of retribution. Evidence suggests that since 1996, a new innocence frame has risen in prevalence and come to dominate public debate. In response, the percentage of Americans opposed to the death penalty has steadily increased (Baumgartner, DeBoef & Boydstun 2004, Fan, Keltner & Wyatt 2002).

Why has the innocence frame been so influential, succeeding where anti-death penalty arguments based on morality have failed? The answer, as we have argued, is that while anti-death penalty morality arguments fell on the deaf ears of an established majority, the rise of the innocence frame has brought a new dimension of consideration to light. This conflict-displacing frame asks people not to abandon the merits of "eye for an eye" arguments but to weigh the importance of one dimension versus a second—recognition that the judicial system may not be perfect. The innocence frame threatens to

destabilize a public debate long-rooted in the dimension of morality. Indeed, as the evidence that the system is broken has mounted, more Americans have given more weight to this new dimension.

Few counter frames exist in direct opposition to the innocence frame. No one argues that mistakes are acceptable; debate could center on how rare these might be. But in the abstract, most would admit that absolute perfection is a standard we cannot achieve in any human institution. It is this lack of public conflict on the innocence dimension that makes it an especially effective conflict-displacing frame, with the ability to affect how citizens think about the death penalty. What is more, this frame has the potential to redistribute public sentiment in a way that benefits the current minority, establishing a new equilibrium level of support for the death penalty at a lower level than in 30 years, since the capital punishment moratorium of 1972.

Hypotheses

Our theoretical focus is on individual cognitive response to different frames. We expect reactions to depend on whether the valence of the frame is consistent or inconsistent with the subjects' expressed opinions and whether the frame type is conflict-reinforcing or conflict-displacing. We present this theory in a two-by-two table where each cell represents a generalizable hypothesis: our expectation for each combination of frame type and consistency/inconsistency with opinion, applicable across issues. The italicized text describes the group or groups of subjects particular to our death penalty experiment addressed by that hypothesis. Thus, we offer a comprehensive *typology* of cognitive response based on the varying intersections of respondent opinion with frame dimension and valence.

Table 1 about here

Row 1 contains two hypotheses related to cognitive responses to conflict-reinforcing frames. Whether these are consistent or inconsistent with a pre-existing attitude, we expect subjects to explain their opinions using the dimension of the frame and the valence of their attitude. Previous scholars have offered strong evidence that individuals will respond in kind to information that affirms their opinions (hypothesis 1) and will bristle at information that challenges their opinions by counter-arguing along the same dimension (hypothesis 2). Thus, whether a conflict-reinforcing frame is consistent or inconsistent with their attitudes, we do not expect it to yield any change in how people think about the

issue or the arguments they use to justify their opinions. People already have strongly held beliefs in this dimension. They hear nothing new in the frame so their responses are driven by their attitudes.

> ***Hypothesis 1:*** Individuals exposed to a morality frame **consistent** with their opinion will be more likely to offer arguments in **SUPPORT** of their opinion by matching the frame's dimension *and* its valence than will individuals exposed to a morality frame with which they disagree.
>
> ***Hypothesis 2:*** Individuals exposed to a morality frame with which they **disagree** will be more likely to offer counter-arguments in **SUPPORT** of their opinion by matching the frame's dimension but contrasting its valence than will individuals exposed to a morality frame consistent with their opinion.

Between Cells 1 and 2 therefore, we expect little different in the dimension of arguments presented. Each group will stick to the morality dimension and each will provide arguments that support their pre-existing attitude, no matter what arguments they were exposed to. The frame has little impact, as it serves only to reinforce pre-existing understandings of the issue.

Row 2 contains two hypotheses related to cognitive responses to the new innocence frame. Subjects who hold anti-death penalty opinions are simply given an additional set of arguments in support of their views. Responses are more complex for those who favor the death penalty. On average, both sets of subjects are expected to accept the validity of the new frame, however, and to incorporate it into their decision calculus.

> ***Hypothesis 3:*** Individuals exposed to the innocence frame **consistent** with their opinion will be more likely to offer arguments in **SUPPORT** of their opinion by matching the frame's dimension and its valence than will individuals exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame also consistent with their opinion. They are also more likely to adopt the frame than those in Cell 4, who disagree with the new innocence frame.

This hypothesis states that subjects exposed to congenial arguments will be predisposed to accept them. But the innocence frame should have a greater impact than the traditional morality frame even among those predisposed to accept either. For those who already oppose the death penalty, the innocence argument reinforces the attitude, giving a new basis of support. For those who oppose the

death penalty, we also expect some effect of the innocence frame, but this effect should be stronger for those in Cell 3 than those in Cell 4.

Hypothesis 4, dealing with those who oppose the death penalty but who are presented with a conflict-displacing argument against it, is most intriguing; findings consistent with this hypothesis would suggest a whole new understanding of how some frames, but not others, succeed in shifting public perspective. For subjects in the bottom righthand cell of our Hypothesis Table, the conflict-displacing frame challenges their attitudes. The decision calculus here is pivotal. We expect some individuals—those who place more weight on the first dimension than on the new second one—to find counter-arguments in support of their opinion along the original first dimension (here the old morality-based arguments), just like those in Cell 2. And some individuals may even find a way to counter-argue against the frame on the new dimension it presents. But we expect many individuals in Cell 4 will act similarly to those in Cell 3. Lacking readily available counter arguments and/or evaluating the second dimension as being at least as significant as the first, these individuals will adopt the new frame and offer their own arguments that match both the dimension and the valence of this new frame (here anti-death penalty innocence arguments). In sum, the subjects of Cell 4 will incorporate into their decision calculus a much more complex way of thinking about the issue, and a more ambivalent attitude results.

> ***Hypothesis 4:*** Individuals exposed to the innocence frame **inconsistent** with their opinion will be more likely to offer arguments in **OPPOSITION** to their own opinion by matching the frame's dimension and its valence than will individuals exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame also inconsistent with their opinion. This is to say that we expect these individuals to be more likely to incorporate counter-arguments against the death penalty into their way of thinking, even if they do not (yet) change their attitude.

In our experiments we provide only a single exposure to a single newspaper article about the death penalty. Therefore we expect no attitude or opinion changes (and our four randomized experimental groups show no significant differences in average support or opposition to the death penalty). However, in asking the subjects to offer their own arguments about the death penalty as justification for their opinions, we can see how complex the decision-calculus is. With even a single exposure to the conflict-displacing innocence frame, both supporters and opponents of the death penalty are expected to incorporate this new second dimension of evaluation into their own arguments. For opponents exposed

to the innocence frame, all the arguments tend in the same direction: to justify their opposition to the practice of capital punishment. For proponents, however, the process is more complex and potentially more important. They incorporate contradictory arguments into their decision calculus. If we conceive of the final conclusion of such a process as a weighted average of a person's estimation of: 1) the relevant dimensions of choice; and 2) the relative weights to assign to these different dimensions, then we can conceive of the expressed opinion as the sum of the weighted preferences along the different dimensions. For those in Cell 4, a single exposure to the new frame is unlikely to cause an attitude shift. However, we do expect it to generate recognition of the importance of the new argument and the underlying second dimension. Thus, their attitudes, and the arguments they offer, are likely to be more ambivalent than those of their pro-death penalty counterparts in other cells.

Hypotheses 1 through 4 and the discussion above present a series of expectations relating to the types of arguments individuals will use to explain or justify their opinions about the death penalty. With regard to the likelihood that a subject will use an argument along the same dimension as that to which they were exposed in the experimental treatment, we expect the following: First, arguments are easier to adopt when they reinforce rather than challenge pre-existing attitudes. Thus, in terms of the probability of subjects using an argument of the same frame presented, we expect to see that Cell 1 > Cell 2 and that Cell 3 > Cell 4. Second, the new innocence frame is congenial to supporters but less demanding of opponents, so we expect its impact to be greater than the morality argument in each case: Cell 3 > Cell 1 and Cell 4 > Cell 2.

Experimental Evidence on Framing Effects

We turn now to our evidence. We designed an experiment and administered it to 184 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory mass communications course at a large northeastern university.[2] Subjects were presented with one of four versions of an 11-page booklet containing a pre-stimulus questionnaire with some control measures, three news articles formatted to resemble photocopies of real newspaper articles, and a post-stimulus questionnaire containing attitudinal measures in the forms of expressed opinions and demographic items (website reference deleted for review).

We placed approximately equal numbers of subjects into each of four groups: one control (receiving a neutral stimulus); one group receiving a pro-death penalty stimulus framed on the morality dimension; one group receiving an anti-death penalty stimulus framed on the morality dimension;

and one group receiving an anti-death penalty stimulus framed on the innocence dimension. The four treatment conditions were created via the manipulation of a fictitious news article describing a legislative debate about the death penalty in an unnamed state. In a manner similar to Nelson et al. (1997*a*), each article contained the same copy as its midsection, with only the headline, lead, and closing paragraphs changed to reflect the appropriate frame (see Appendix A for the text of each treatment condition). We included equal mention of each of the frame arguments in this common middle paragraph. So all subjects, even in the control group, had access to each of the three substantive arguments (pro-death penalty morality, anti-death penalty morality, and anti-death penalty innocence). The treatment conditions reinforced these arguments but they were presented to every subject. No additional factual information was provided in the lead and closing paragraphs unique to each treatment; these paragraphs served only to frame the debate. The manipulated death-penalty article was placed in between two authentic articles describing current debate on two sociopolitical issues: health care reform and environmental protection. To avoid possible confounding influences, specific writers were not mentioned in the bylines and gender-neutral names were used in the attribution of all direct quotes given in the death penalty articles.

Immediately after reading the three articles, subjects were instructed to list up to five arguments that they recalled from each, via three separate items.[3] They were then told that they would be asked more in-depth questions on one of the three issues about which they had read. We deceptively described this to the subjects as a random choice of the three policy areas, but in fact all were asked about the death penalty. The first measure taken was subjects' support for or opposition to the death penalty for persons convicted of murder.[4] Immediately following the opinion measure, subjects were asked to list the most important factors (arguments) that they took into consideration when forming their opinion about the death penalty.

We coded open-ended responses to capture three main attributes of each argument offered by each subject: the dimension on which the argument was given (morality, innocence, constitutionality, etc.); the valence of the argument (pro-death penalty, anti-death penalty, or neutral); and the order of the argument in relation to the others given (first argument, second argument, etc.). Each argument was coded according to a set of guidelines organized around four main categories: pro-death penalty arguments along the morality dimension (morality-pro), anti-death penalty arguments along the morality dimension (morality-anti), pro-death penalty arguments along the innocence dimension

(innocence-pro), anti-death penalty arguments along the innocence dimension (innocence-anti), and all others (such as constitutionalism, considerations about the mental health of the defendant, the financial cost of the death penalty as opposed to life in prison, etc.). Intercoder reliability between two independent coders was .95.

Results

In order for a frame to have a cognitive impact, it must affect how people think about an issue. We assess the cognitive impact of frames by analyzing the patterns of arguments about the death penalty that subjects offered after exposure to one of the morality or the innocence frame. To test our four hypotheses we compare the valence and dimension of each frame to the valence and dimension of arguments given by subjects exposed to that frame, in relation to the subject's expressed opinion.

We begin by describing the distribution of subjects' arguments across treatments. After reading the news articles, subjects were asked to give their overall opinion on the death penalty and then to list the most important considerations (arguments) they took into account in coming to this opinion.[5] We focus on the open-ended responses here. Two subjects offered no arguments for their opinions and were excluded from analysis; 182 subjects gave at least one. A total of 500 arguments were given altogether, including 66 morality-pro, 77 morality-anti, 3 innocence-pro, and 45 innocence-anti, and 312 "other".[6] Table 2 lays out the distribution of responses for the three categories of interest, by experimental frame group and by subject's opinion on the death penalty.

Table 2 about here

As we expected, subjects exposed to morality frames were highly likely to give morality (or other) arguments consistent with their opinions. Aside from "other" arguments, pro-death penalty subjects exposed to the morality-pro frame (corresponding to Cell 1 of the hypothesis table) gave only morality-pro arguments as their primary arguments, and those exposed to the morality-anti frame (Cell 2) counter-argued, giving morality-pro arguments rather than the morality-anti arguments to which they were exposed by a rate of 9:2 (see the top panel of Table 2). No subject in either group gave innocence arguments first. In contrast, innocence arguments were given first at a rate of 6:5 among those pro-death penalty subjects exposed to the innocence frame (Cell 4), and four of these six were anti-death

penalty in tone. Even among death penalty supporters, there was acknowledgement of the anti-death penalty innocence argument in valence as well as dimension.

The bottom panel of the table presents similar information for subjects opposed to the death penalty. Here the distribution of first arguments again reflects the attitude of subjects: only one subject opposed to the death penalty and exposed to the morality-pro frame (Cell 1) gave a matching morality-pro argument first, the rest were split between anti-death penalty arguments and "other". Death penalty opponents exposed to the morality-anti frame (Cell 2), however, adopted the argument of this frame when talking about the death penalty. And those exposed to the fairness-anti frame (Cell 3) used the language of this new dimension. In fact, in the case of death penalty opponents, a few subjects in each treatment group invoked the innocence-anti argument. It makes sense that this argument is more familiar and/or more accessible to those predisposed against the death penalty.

Testing the Hypotheses We conduct formal multivariate tests of our hypotheses using two logit analyses to test the four hypotheses outlined in Table 1. Recall that our hypotheses depend upon both the type of frame to which a subject is exposed and whether the valence of that frame is consistent or inconsistent with the subject's opinion. The four hypotheses represent two distinct types of cognitive processes at work when individuals of differing opinions are exposed to different frames. In the first, subjects stick to their attitudes and relay arguments consistent with their opinions, either because the stimulus is reinforcing—in which case the reasoning process is straightforward—or because the dimension is familiar—in which case the counter-arguments are familiar and thus the reasoning process is familiar as well. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 anticipate this first type of reaction. Only when individuals are confronted with a frame that challenges their opinions but that does so by utilizing argumentation that runs orthogonal to the traditional dimension of debate is the cognitive process qualitatively distinct; Hypothesis 4. In this case, individuals are asked not to confront the old dimension, but to consider the possibility that a new dimension deserves consideration and to include it in their arguments. Thus we expect these individuals to reason about their opinions using the language of the conflict-displacing frame and for many to do so in ways inconsistent with their attitudes. This prediction is really quite extraordinary, especially in domains (like the issue of capital punishment) where opinions are known to be fixed in the short run and rest on moral foundations with a history of stability.

The Models We test our four hypotheses using two binary logit models: the first models subjects' propensity to offer arguments consistent with the frame they received by responding in kind with arguments along the same dimension and of matching valence as the given frame, while the second models subjects' propensity to counter-argue against the frame received by responding with arguments along the same dimension as the given frame but of opposite valence. The first model will address Hypotheses 1, 3, and 4 and will provide necessary but insufficient support for Hypothesis 2; the second model is needed to test Hypotheses 2 directly.

Dependent Variables In the first model, the dependent variable is a binary measure of whether or not the first argument that a subject offered matched the frame to which he or she was exposed, both in dimension and in valence. So subjects in the morality-pro treatment group who offered a morality-pro argument as their first argument are coded 1, while subjects in this group who offered any other kind of response are coded 0. The dependent variable in the second model is a binary measure of whether or not the subject's first argument is a direct counter-argument to the frame received. So subjects in the innocence-anti treatment group who offered a innocence-pro argument as their first argument are coded 1; all other subjects in this group are coded 0 (and similarly for those in the morality groups).

Independent Variables In both models, what we care about is whether different framing circumstances (the intersection of frame type with whether the frame is consistent or inconsistent with a subject's opinion) yield differing likelihoods that the subject will offer arguments that match or counter-argue against the frame received. Thus, on the right hand side of both models are three explanatory variables that, together with the baseline category, describe each of the four framing circumstances we consider in our experiment: 1) Subjects are exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame consistent with their opinions, 2) Subjects are exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame inconsistent with their opinions, 3) Subjects are exposed to a conflict-displacing frame consistent with their opinions, and 4) Subjects are exposed to a conflict-displacing frame inconsistent with their opinions. We expect each of these four categories to demonstrate a different likelihood for each of the two dependent variables considered in accordance with the hypotheses outlined above.

We include only one control variable: political interest. In essence, both models test the extent to which subjects in different framing circumstances "stick to their guns"; that is, how resolute subjects

are in offering arguments consistent with their opinions or, alternately, how much they are swayed to offer arguments that contradict them. Political interest is the only variable we believe has a strong theoretical likelihood of affecting how "flexible" a subject is in considering and voicing arguments different from their preconceptions of the issue. The more engaged a subject is in the political world, the more likely that subject is to have considered all major aspects of an issue. In the case of the death penalty, subjects with high levels of political awareness had probably encountered each of the frames used in our mock news articles before participating in our experiment. These subjects have had greater opportunity to consider arguments of morality and innocence and to adjust their opinion on the matter or develop counter-arguments accordingly. We exclude all other potential controls because we have no reason to think that any other variable (party identification, sex, race, etc.) has a strong relationship with how able/willing a subject will be to consider and adopt a new argument.[7]

Findings. Our two models estimate the framing effects of three categories of framing circumstances (Cells 2, 3, and 4) relative to a baseline of the circumstance in which subjects are exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame consistent with their opinions (Cell 1). We are interested in these comparisons, but also in those between other pairings of treatment groups such as Cell 2 and Cell 4 (Hypothesis 4), information we obtain by calculating predicted probabilities. In short, we find strong support for each of our hypotheses and indeed for the full structure of inequalities that we predicted.[8]

We find direct support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 by in the logit results for Models 1 and 2 respectively, as presented in Table 3. Model 1 produces a coefficient for "reinforcing inconsistent" that is both negative and statistically significant at the .05 level, demonstrating support for Hypothesis 1 that subjects exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame consistent with their opinions are significantly more likely to offer arguments that match the frame they received than subjects exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame inconsistent with their opinions. This same independent variable also yields a positive coefficient in Model 2, significant at the .01 level, offering support for Hypothesis 2 that subjects exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame inconsistent with their opinions are significantly more likely to counter-argue in direct opposition to the frame they received than subjects exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame consistent with their opinions.

Table 3 about here

Using Clarify, we calculate predicted probabilities based on the results from Model 1 to demonstrate

support for Hypotheses 3 and 4, confirm Hypothesis 1 and, by indirect extension, Hypothesis 2.[9] For each treatment group, Table 4 shows the predicted probability that the subjects in that group offered primary arguments that matched the dimension and valence of the given frame (i.e, y=1) holding all other treatment group dummies at zero. Given this configuration of independent variables, we see that subjects in Cell 3 have the highest predicted probability matching the given frame with a probability of 0.321. Subjects in Cell 1 have the second highest at 0.265, followed by subjects in Cell 4 at 0.170 and finally subjects in Cell 2 at 0.084. Although the confidence intervals are wide (a product of our small sample size), the picture presented is clear: In general, subjects are more apt to offer matching arguments in response to frames that are consistent with the subjects' attitudes. Thus, Cells 1 and 3 have larger probabilities than Cells 2 and 4, confirming support for Hypothesis 1. At the same time, conflict-displacing frames are unanimously more compelling than conflict-reinforcing frames, regardless of whether the audience agrees or disagrees with the policy stance of the frame: Cell 3 demonstrates a larger probability value than Cell 1, just as Cell 4 shows a larger probability value than Cell 2. Thus, each of a series of inequalities that we expected is borne out in the analysis.

Table 4 about here

These results are illustrated graphically in Figure 1, which shows the relative likelihoods of subjects in each of the four cell categories to offer primary arguments that match the frame they received both in dimension and in valence, controlling for levels of political awareness. We find confirmatory support for Hypothesis 1 by noting that, regardless of political interest, subjects exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame consistent with their opinions (Cell 1) are consistently more likely to offer arguments that match the dimension and valence of the frame they received than subjects also exposed to a conflict-reinforcing frame but one that is inconsistent with their opinions (Cell 2). In fact, the full series of inequalities remain consistent with our expectations, across all levels of political interest. Further, the Figure makes clear that these are powerful effects. The predicted probabilities of giving a certain type of argument, based on these few factors, ranges from close to zero to above 0.60.

Finally, Figure 1 shows strong evidence in support of our most important expectations, Hypothesis 4: Subjects exposed to a conflict-displacing frame inconsistent with their opinions (Cell 4) will be more likely to offer arguments in opposition to their opinion than subjects also exposed to a frame inconsistent with their opinions but one that is conflict-reinforcing (Cell 2). In fact, for subjects with the highest levels of political interest, exposure to a conflict-displacing frame inconsistent with subjects'

opinions actually has a greater likelihood of compelling subjects to offer arguments that match the frame than exposure to a conflict-reinforcing frame consistent with subjects' opinions (Cell 1), even though in the former case this requires subjects to make arguments in contrast with their opinions. Thus, from both the support overturning our Hypothesis 3 and the evidence demonstrating Hypothesis 4, we see that whether presented to a receptive or a contentious audience, conflict-displacing frames have a special buying power not shared by conflict-reinforcing frames. All frames are not equal.

Figure 1 about here

Conclusion

We have shown that individuals respond differently when presented with conflict-displacing v. conflict-reinforcing frames of argumentation. In the death penalty, morality has long been the dominant form of discourse. Moral issues have a way of becoming stale, since it is hard to reason with opponents when the basis of the attitudes on all sides is a hard moral or religious feeling; such debates are prone to prolonged disagreement and stalemate. But the new innocence frame, by circumventing the traditional terms of debate, has the potential to destabilize public discussion on this familiar issue. The experimental evidence we have presented here corresponds closely to the nature of historical developments in the national discussion about the death penalty. In fact, three of us have been involved in a long-lasting project analyzing media and public opinion on the death penalty (see citation deleted for review). This project includes systematically coding over 3,000 newspaper stories published in the *New York Times* from 1960 to present. In designing the experiment that forms the basis for this paper, we were careful to replicate the main themes of that coding. This analysis shows that since 1996 the new innocence frame has received unprecedented levels of coverage, and our studies of public opinion indicate that aggregate levels of opposition to the death penalty are increasing substantially among the public, arguably in direct response to this frame. In this paper, we have demonstrated some evidence about the individual-level cognitive processes that are behind these aggregate-level findings. The death penalty debate is shifting and the movement away from a morality-based argument to a new type of discussion has the potential for substantial opinion change. We have explained here why this is the case. The new frame does not simply ask people to admit that they were previously mistaken; rather, it proposes a cognitively simpler task, one involving merely incorporating another dimension into the debate. Of course, change is not immediate and even in our experiment we do not expect

that individuals will change their opinions after the presentation of a single newspaper story. The framing effects from a single exposure are known to be short-lived (Druckman & Nelson 2003), but the innocence argument continues to receive increasing media attention. With only a single exposure to the innocence frame, subjects in our experiment—most notably death penalty supporters—began to think differently about this important issue. This finding goes a long way towards explaining the recent shifts in aggregate opinion.

The most important implications of our results relate to the possibility of better understanding the linkages between elite discourse on public issues and reactions among the public. A multitude of frames are constantly before the public in the form of policy discourse, media coverage, and events. Public opinion changes only slowly on moral issues, of course. Just what is a moral issue and what is a practical one is in the eye of the beholder. And the death penalty, like many others, has both moral and practical dimensions. The future of the death penalty debate in America may not be as stable as its past. We have shown here the potentially powerful destabilizing cognitive process that the new innocence-frame puts into play, not only for those who oppose the death penalty, but more importantly for those who support it. Our study reveals that conflict-displacing frames (both those which reinforce and those which challenge an individual's attitudes) have a stronger influence on the arguments the individual offers in support of her or his opinion than conflict-reinforcing frames. Simply put, people reason differently about conflict-displacing frames than they do about conflict-reinforcing ones. This finding should be of particular interest to policy advocates, suggesting that the use of the compelling conflict-displacing frames may be the most effective strategy for agenda control.

Table 1: **Hypothesized Patterns of Response to Various Frames, by Pre-existing Attitude**

	Opinion-Consistent (Agree)	Opinion-Inconsistent (Disagree)
Conflict-Reinforcing Frame (Morality)	1. Attitudes Reinforced; Individuals will argue with matching valence on the moral dimension. [*Pro-DP subjects exposed to morality-pro frame; Anti-DP subjects exposed to morality-anti frame*]	2. Attitudes Reinforced; Individuals will counter-argue on the moral dimension. [*Pro-DP subjects exposed to morality-anti frame; Anti-DP subjects exposed to morality-pro frame*]
Conflict-Displacing Frame (Innocence)	3. Attitudes Reinforced; Individuals will argue with matching valence on the new innocence dimension as well as on the traditional morality dimension. [*Anti-DP subjects exposed to innocence-anti frame*]	4. Attitudes Weakened; Some individuals will counter-argue, justifying their attitudes, but others will incorporate the new innocence dimension, even though it runs counter to their attitude. [*Pro-DP subjects exposed to innocence-anti frame*]

Table 2: **Primary Opinion Arguments by Treatment and Attitude**

Pro-Death Penalty Subjects

		Experimental Treatment Group			
Argument	**Control**	**Morality-Pro Frame**	**Innocence-Anti Frame**	**Morality-Anti Frame**	**Total**
Morality-Anti	1	0	0	2	3
Innocence-Anti	1	0	4	0	5
Morality-Pro	4	5	5	9	23
Innocence-Pro	1	0	2	0	3
Other	20	24	15	18	77
Total	27	29	26	29	111

Anti-Death Penalty Subjects

		Experimental Treatment Group			
Argument	**Control**	**Morality-Pro Frame**	**Innocence-Anti Frame**	**Morality-Anti Frame**	**Total**
Morality-Anti	4	4	6	8	22
Innocence-Anti	4	3	5	2	14
Morality-Pro	0	1	0	0	1
Innocence-Pro	0	0	0	0	0
Other	6	6	5	5	22
Total	14	14	16	15	59

Cell entries give the number of arguments given by subjects exposed to each treatment.

Table 3: **Predictors of Subject's Argument Matching/Counter-Arguing Frame**

Variable	**Model 1 Subject's Primary Argument Matches Frame**	**Model 2 Subject's Primary Argument Counter-Argues Against Frame**
Reinforcing Inconsistent	-1.508^{*}	18.518^{**}
	(0.676)	(0.198)
Displacing Consistent	0.272	
	(0.625)	
Displacing Inconsistent	-0.611	16.790
	(0.628)	
Political Interest	-0.028	-0.210
	(0.147)	(0.198)
Constant	-0.950	-18.525
	(0.612)	(0.976)
N	137	137
chi2	7.89	29.89

Standard errors are in parentheses. Significance levels : † : 10% $*$: 5% $**$: 1%.

The dependent variable for Model 1 is coded 1 if the primary argument given matches the frame received in both dimension and valence. In Model 2 the dependent variable is coded 1 if the subject's primary argument is on the same dimension as the frame received but of opposing valence. The dependent variables are not symmetric because subjects can offer neutral responses and/or responses on other dimensions. The independent variables correspond to the four cells laid out in Table 1, with Cell 1 as the baseline condition. In Model 2, the "Displacing Consistent" dummy variable is dropped due to perfect collinearity. Similarly, since there are only two cases in which subjects in Cell 4 counter-argued against the given frame, there is insufficient information by which to calculate a standard error for the "Displacing Inconsistent" dummy, although a coefficient is provided. Thus, consistent with our expectations, subjects were highly receptive to the conflict-displacing frame. Accordingly, no subjects in Cell 3 and a negligible 2 subjects in Cell 4 counter-argued against the frame they received, lending strong support for our theory at the unfortunate expense of having no coefficients to report in these instances for Model 2.

Table 4: **Predicted Probabilities of Subject's Primary Argument Matching Frame**

Framing Treatment Group	**Pr(y=1|x)**	**95% Confidence Interval**
Conflict-Reinforcing Consistent (Cell 1)	0.265	(0.162, 0.397)
	(0.060)	
Conflict-Reinforcing Inconsistent (Cell 2)	0.084	(0.025, 0.194)
	(0.046)	
Conflict-Displacing Consistent (Cell 3)	0.321	(0.136, 0.567)
	(0.110)	
Conflict-Displacing Inonsistent (Cell 4)	0.170	(0.062, 0.332)
	(0.073)	

Standard errors are in parentheses beneath each predicted probability.

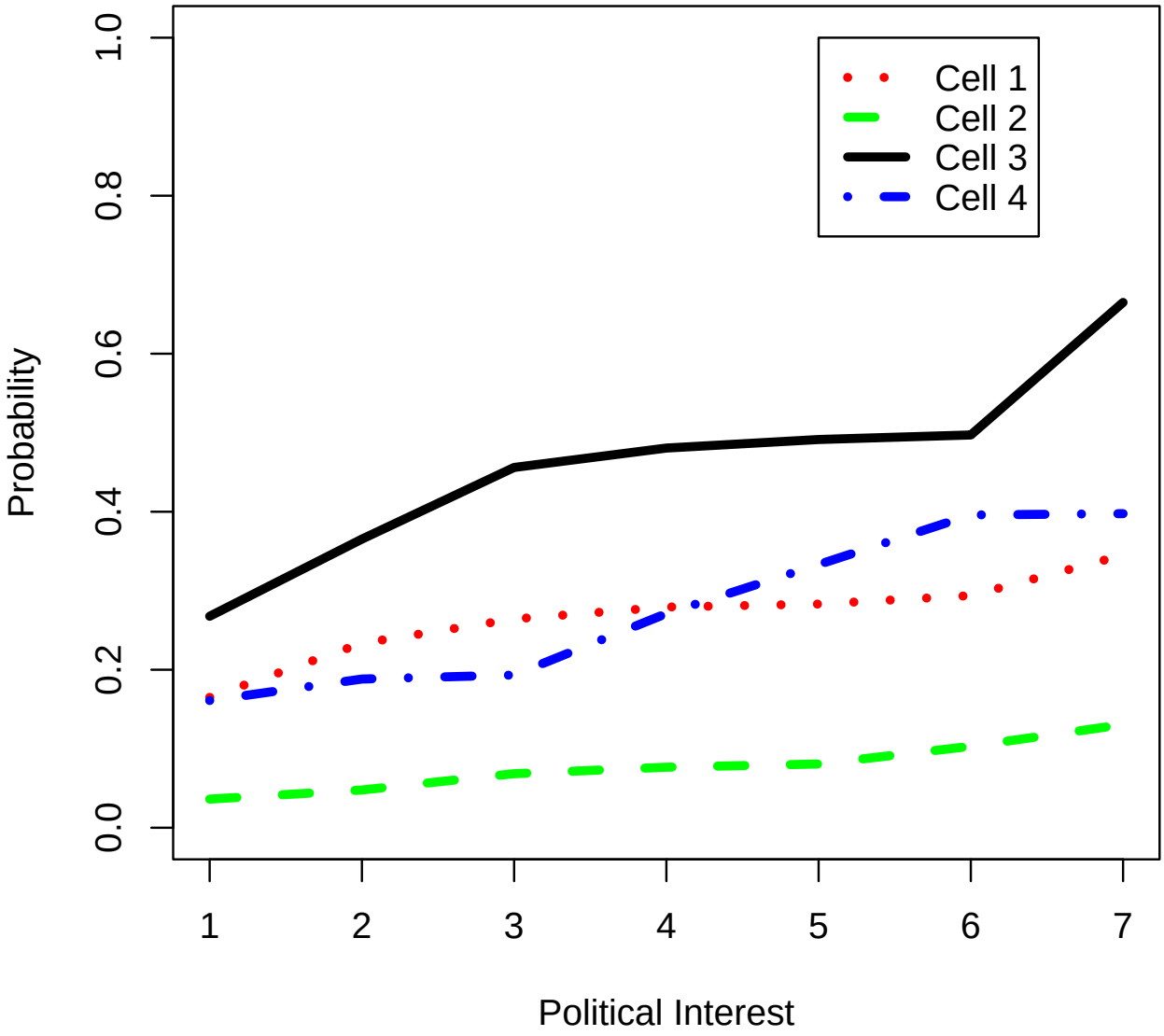

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Presenting an Argument Along the Same Dimension as the Frame Received, by Political Interest

Appendix A. Text of Manipulated Newspaper Articles

Each experimental group read a similar "newspaper" story. The stories were composed to resemble a photocopy of an actual newspaper article. The headlines, lead, and closing paragraphs were manipulated. In each case the middle two paragraphs were identical. Treatments were as follows:

Neutral Condition / Control Group

Capital punishment debated: Lawmakers intensify dispute

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation that has been the source of much political friction in the last week. Legislators are strongly divided on the issue, as witnessed by the heated nature of this morning's discussion, and the debate is expected to continue into the early part of next week. This is a familiar agenda item in the state senate, which has deliberated capital punishment legislation twice in the last three years, each time with great conflict and turmoil. This morning's meeting was no exception.

[Middle paragraphs inserted here; see below]

Even the brevity of the session has raised concern among some lawmakers who expressed reluctance to decide on a bill of such importance in a three-day special session. Nevertheless, the debate will end in a vote Monday. It is difficult to predict whether the problematic nature of this session will influence how this group of legislators, usually hailed for its ability to reach bipartisan compromises, will handle future policy issues. One thing is clear: it is doubtful that a full consensus will be reached by Monday.

Anti-Death Penalty / Morality Frame

Capital punishment denounced: Moral objections dominate legislative debate

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation, which some officials say threatens the moral balance of our society by sanctioning state-sponsored murder. These legislators called today for a more civilized penal system that tempers the heat of emotion and directs society instead toward alternative punishments and greater respect for human life. "It discredits us," Senator Pat James said, "both as statesmen and as human beings, to be reduced to a level where we act through violence and bloodlust in the name of justice."

[Middle paragraphs inserted here; see below]

For many, the issue is a moral one, and many say the death penalty is morally wrong. It is inappropriate, some lawmakers argue, for decisions about life and death to rest in human hands. They contend that government should not pass final judgment on human beings, no matter what they have done, because the weight of that judgment is too great for society to bear. "The death penalty is still killing, and killing is a sin," Senator Chris Thomas said. "State-sponsored killing is just as wrong as the original murder for which these criminals should be punished."

Anti-Death Penalty / innocence Frame

Capital punishment denounced: Flaws in system dominate legislative debate

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation, which some officials say threatens the lives of innocent people accused of crimes they did not commit. These legislators cite exonerations as proof of errors in the system—errors that are human and unavoidable. "Our death penalty system is not just deeply flawed," Senator Pat James said. "For the wrongly convicted its flaws are fatal. Our society has deemed the execution of a few innocents an acceptable price to pay to eliminate the guilty, and that's a disgrace."

[Middle paragraphs inserted here; see below]

For many, the question is simple: Can we guarantee that the system is 100 percent perfect, that no mistake could ever be made? For many lawmakers, the answer is no. "Executing the wrong person is the most ghastly error imaginable, because its an error we can't undo," Senator Chris Thomas said. "The death penalty is a human-designed institution. And while we can add safeguards, we can never be sure that the system will be perfect, not just beyond a reasonable doubt, but absolutely perfect. When dealing with a matter of life and death, we must have that certainty."

Pro-Death Penalty / Morality Frame

Capital punishment advocated: Moral approval dominates legislative debate

State lawmakers clashed again today over pending death penalty legislation, which some officials say threatens the moral balance of society by placing greater value on the rights of criminals than on the lives of victims. The memories of victims who have been slain are disgraced, they claim, by "quarrelling over legalities." "It is nothing short of common decency," Senator Pat James said this morning, "to act in proportional response to evil deeds. When an individual commits murder with malice and without mercy, that person deserves to die."

[Middle paragraphs inserted here; see below]

For many, the issue is a moral one, and many say the death penalty is morally justified. Simply put, they believe some crimes are terrible enough to demand the death penalty. "It would be unethical for us to deliver any softer punishment for these brutal crimes, as if the worth of the victim's life could be measured via sentencing guidelines," Senator Chris Thomas said. "I cannot in good conscience tell the mother of a child who has been murdered that the only punishment the killer will receive is a lifetime guarantee of free room and board."

Middle Paragraphs (same in all treatments)

Some lawmakers argue that there are crimes heinous enough to warrant the death penalty. Leaders from a variety of religions support this view, saying government has a moral responsibility to answer crime with a reciprocal response. Other legislators point to flaws in the system—citing cases in which death row inmates have been proven innocent, even after their convictions—to argue that the risk of executing an innocent person is too great a price to pay. Still other lawmakers contend that the death penalty is immoral, saying that government should not be responsible for taking human life. In support of this position, religious leaders from many faiths denounce capital punishment as a sin.

The death penalty has been deemed illegal in the United States only once, when the Supreme Court placed an effectual moratorium on capital punishment from 1972 to 1976. Each state makes its own decision about the death penalty, and today 38 states enforce it. This number has fluctuated over the years, as many states have struggled to craft legislation on which lawmakers can agree. Although most states have revised their capital punishment guidelines over the last 50 years to make lethal injection the primary or only mode of execution, many other points of contention still exist, as illustrated by this morning's divisive session.

Appendix B. Open-Ended Coding

Each open-ended recall and opinion argument response was coded according to pre-established guidelines. We considered 24 specific codes for the substance of the response, each falling under one of three broad categories of interest relating to the frames employed in the mock news articles: morality, innocence, and all else. Each response received (only) one of these codes. Each response was also coded for valence (pro-death penalty, anti-death penalty, or neutral/indiscernable). More detailed listings of specific morality and innocence codes are given below with examples.

Morality Codes

Morality codes were classified under the following codes: general morality; the severity/heinousness of the crime; killing/vengeance is wrong; appropriateness of death as a punishment; whether or not the government has the responsibility/authority to take lives/"play God"; nature of the crime/case (whether the crime was premeditated/the intent of the crime); the relationship between the defendant and the victim; victim characteristics: the number of victims/the age of the victim(s)/whether the victim was particularly vulnerable in some way (e.g., elderly, mentally handicapped, etc.); and defendant characteristics: whether the defendant has a prior criminal record/the age of the defendant (at the time of the crime).

Examples include "government has a moral responsibility to answer crime with a reciprocal response" (coded as pro-death penalty); "eye for an eye" (coded as pro-death penalty); "victim deserves vindication" (coded as pro-death penalty); "the government doesn't have the right to play God" (coded as anti-death penalty); "the death penalty is still killing, and killing is a sin" (coded as anti-death penalty); "the death penalty is barbaric" (coded as anti-death penalty); "the value of life" (coded as neutral); "issues of morality" (coded as neutral); and "does the crime fit the punishment" (coded as neutral).

Innocence Code

The innocence codes included issues of fairness, innocence, and potential flaws in the system. Examples include: "there are no flaws in the system" (coded as pro-death penalty); "the death penalty threatens the lives of innocent people accused of crimes they did not commit" (coded as anti-death penalty); "errors in the system are human and unavoidable" (coded as anti-death penalty); and "whether or not the person was really guilty" (coded as neutral).

Notes

[1]There is no guarantee that an individual who finds the new innocence argument credible will give that dimension more weight than the moral dimension. Instead, it is reasonable to think of attitudes as reflecting weighted sums of preferences along different dimensions. Our focus is on the cognitive reaction to the new frame, not relative weights.

[2]Description of Subjects: The subject pool was composed of 144 females and 44 males with an average age of 20.2 years. The religious breakdown was 82 Catholic, 26 Protestant, 20 Jewish, 1 Muslim, 1 Buddhist, 27 Other, and 25 "None." One hundred sixty subjects described themselves as "white," 6 as "Asian," 5 as "Hispanic/Latino," 4 as "Black/African American," and 7 as "other." As all the subjects were students at the same university and enrolled in the same class, there is considerably more homogeneity in this sample than would be the case with a broader pool of subjects. We expect this homogeneity to reduce any possible treatment effects. Effectively, it produces increased controls for possible confounding factors, enhancing internal validity.

[3]These recall measures served to confirm the saliency of the framing manipulations. Not reported here, analysis of recall data yields three reassuring conclusions. First, recalls are a function of the frame received—exposure to news articles increases arguments accessibility, subjects recall what they've heard. Second, treatment effects are similar for subjects opposed to and in support of the death penalty; the recall process is unencumbered by the psychology of projection effects. Third, the effects of all treatments are similar.

[4]Although this opinion measure was taken after subjects had been exposed to the framing stimulus, we employ it as a reliable proxy for subjects' attitudes toward the death penalty because we can safely say, both theoretically and empirically, that such a brief stimulus would have at most a negligible impact on attitudes toward this issue, being deeply rooted as they are in core values. Our purpose is to show that even a brief framing stimulus, while insufficient to alter attitudes, affects cognitive reasoning.

[5]The distribution of the overall opinion (collapsed from a thermometer scale measure) was 110 pro-death penalty, 60 anti-death penalty, and 13 neutral.

[6]The bulk of the "other" responses contained references to the contingencies of the hypothetical crime. For example, "the nature of the crime," "how many victims were killed," or "the defendant's mental state," etc. While some of these arguments were clearly made in support or opposition of the death penalty, the majority took the form of "it depends on..." arguments that do not lend themselves to valence coding. Consistent with the findings of a pre-test we conducted, many subjects across all treatment groups centered their arguments around these "it depends" considerations. This makes sense; without repeated and specific direction, individuals and especially college students gravitate towards the "what if's" of a policy question, here the aggravating and mitigating particulars of a hypothetical murder. Those subjects who comprise the variation in our findings are the ones who were compelled by a given frame to deviate from this realm of circumstance and consider

instead the more theoretical and philosophical dimension of consideration placed before them when asked to weigh issues of morality or innocence. The same is true, we believe, in the real world of political spin.

[7]Multiple runs of these models using a range of different variable combinations shows that the selection of control variables has a negligible impact on the results. We place political interest on the right hand side of our models because there is theoretical support for doing so, but our findings do not rely on its inclusion.

[8]Although our experiment included a control group of subjects who read a news article that maintained a neutral tone, our focus here is comparing the effects of one frame to another. Thus, the control group is excluded in our analysis.

[9]Clarify allows us to make the most efficient use of our data, particularly given our small sample size. See (King, Tomz & Wittenberg 2000).

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