

The Electoral Consequences of Issue Frames

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What happens after issue frames shape public opinion? We offer an account of the downstream effects of issue frames on candidate choice. We then use three studies combining issue framing experiments with conjoint candidate choice experiments to directly assess these downstream effects. Despite an ideal setting for elite influence on public opinion, we find that frames ultimately have modest effects on how the public later evaluates politicians. Our theoretical framework highlights two sources of this disconnect. Frame-induced opinion change is only one component, often outweighed by other factors, in candidate choice, and the issues most amenable to framing are the least relevant for evaluating candidates. This introduces a new consideration into debates about the political consequences of issue frames. Even after they change the public's policy opinions, issue frames may still have limited implications for other political outcomes.

Politicians, interest groups, and other advocates frame policy debates in order to influence public opinion. If they succeed, these efforts shape the opinions the public carries into their future political decisions. Through this process, issue frames “fundamentally change political outcomes by altering how and what people think” (Klar, Robison, and Druckman 2013, 174).

These “downstream effects” on other outcomes are a key channel through which issue frames affect politics (Druckman 2011; Jacoby 2000; Kinder 2003). They also contribute to broader concerns that framing effects on the public's policy opinions “pose a serious challenge for the study of representation” (Druckman 2014, 467; see also Jacobs and Shapiro 2000) and “raise radical doubts about democracy” (Entman 1993, 57; see also Bartels 2003). Despite this, research offers little theoretical guidance as to how frames produce downstream effects. Moreover, because prior studies end by assessing the public's policy opinions, they are unable to directly observe a frame's subsequent impact on other political outcomes.

This article presents new theory and evidence on the downstream effects of issue frames on one key outcome: can-

didate choice. We explain the effects of issue frames on candidate choice as a two-stage process in which an issue frame initially shifts public opinion and the public subsequently incorporates these frame-induced issue opinions into its candidate preferences. Using a new experimental design that combines issue framing experiments and conjoint candidate choice experiments, we directly assess a frame's downstream effect on candidate choice. We implement this design on three different subject pools, including a large and nationally representative sample, and use a variety of issues, including several drawn from prior framing studies (i.e., Druckman and Leeper 2012; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Hiscox 2006; Sniderman and Theriault 2004).

While later sections explain these experiments in greater detail, one advantage is important to note here. Using conjoint experiments to examine candidate preferences measures the downstream effects of frames in a multidimensional setting that accounts for a number of other factors relevant to candidate choice (e.g., a candidate's partisanship or occupation). This also places the downstream effects of frames in context by enabling comparisons to the effects of other—randomly assigned—characteristics included in the candidate profiles.

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This approach offers novel evidence on the downstream effects of issue frames. We find that issue frames have detectable, if modest, consequences for how individuals decide between politicians. In our third study, conducted on a nationally representative sample of respondents, the downstream effects of frames on candidate choice are much smaller than the impact of shared partisanship with a candidate and slightly smaller than a candidate's profession. Given that our design created relatively favorable conditions for frames to influence candidate choice—a one-sided messaging environment with unknown candidates, large initial framing effects on the public's policy opinions, and communication emphasizing the importance of these issues for assessing candidates—these results offer an upper bound on the impact of frames on electoral outcomes. Despite these limits, the downstream effects of issue frames that we observe indicate that they can still prove consequential for political outcomes in otherwise close elections.

Our theoretical account highlights two sources of the disconnect between the effects of frames on issue opinions and their more limited implications for candidate choice. First, individual issue positions are only one component, often outweighed by other factors, in voter's evaluations of candidates. Even if frames successfully shift issue opinion, the electoral consequences are limited by other factors that matter for candidate choice.

Second, we identify a trade-off between the effectiveness of frames at shaping public opinion on an issue and that issue's relevance for candidate choice. Consistent with previous research, we find sizable framing effects on some issues. However, these same issues are ultimately among the least relevant we examine for the public's assessments of politicians. In contrast, public preferences over more salient issues for candidate choice prove resistant to issue frames.

This introduces a new consideration into debates about the political relevance of issue frames. Extant research focuses on whether frames affect the public's policy opinions in settings with elite competition or opportunities for deliberation (e.g., Druckman and Nelson 2003; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). This establishes when frames are likely to affect the public's policy opinions but fails to consider further limits on their subsequent political impact. Using a broader conception of framing outcomes, this study shows that even after frames successfully shift the public's issue opinions, they can still have limited effects on candidate choice.¹ While further research is needed to examine the implications of issue framing effects for other political outcomes, this study offers an impor-

1. Of course, frames can also have a high degree of political relevance outside of their implications for candidate choice. We discuss this in our concluding section.

tant piece of contrasting evidence to prior accounts in which framing effects on the public's policy opinions undermine political accountability more broadly (Bartels 2003; Druckman 2014; Entman 1993).

FRAMING EFFECTS ON PUBLIC OPINION

By raising the prominence of certain considerations during the opinion formation process, *emphasis frames* from politicians and the media shape opinion toward issues and political events (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007b; Jacoby 2000; Jerit 2009; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997). Table 1 offers an example of two opposing emphasis frames on national security policy. In the left column, the civil liberty frame emphasizes concerns about individual privacy raised by the Patriot Act. Alternatively, the terrorism frame in the right column highlights the security threats this policy is designed to address. These opposing frames raise the salience of different considerations when individuals evaluate national security policy. In the process, they lead members of the public to arrive at different opinions. Individuals exposed to the civil liberty frame exhibit significantly less support for the Patriot Act compared to an otherwise similar group exposed to the terrorism frame (Druckman and Leeper 2012).²

These types of alternative issue frames appear throughout media coverage (Chong and Druckman 2011), and defining the frame used to discuss an issue represents a frequent topic of elite contestation (Baumgartner, De Boef, and Boydston 2008; Entman 2004; Gamson et al. 1992). As many people—even the more politically involved or informed (Druckman and Nelson 2003; Iyengar 1991)—appear susceptible to frames, control over the manner in which an issue is framed offers broad influence on public opinion (e.g., Riker 1986; Schattschneider 1960).

ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF ISSUE FRAMING

The political relevance of issue frames stems, in part, from their downstream effects on other outcomes (Kinder 2003, 378). In particular, scholars reference the *electoral consequences* of issue frames for the public's evaluations of politicians (e.g., Druckman 2011, 289; Klar et al. 2013, 174). Jacoby (2000, 763) argues that political leaders use issue frames to move public opinion in their favor and create "a policy-based rationale for citizens to choose their parties' candidates in the voting booth." These downstream effects invert classic accounts of representation (e.g., Dahl 1971). In-

2. Recent work challenges the mechanism behind framing effects (e.g., Leeper and Slothuus 2016; Scheufele and Iyengar 2012). For our current purpose, the mechanism behind these effects is less important than their consequences, whether brought about by increased salience or new information, for candidate choice.

Table 1. Opposing Issue Frames on National Security Policy

Civil Liberty Frame	Terrorism Frame
Under the Patriot Act, the government has access to citizens' confidential information from telephone and e-mail communications.	Under the Patriot Act, the government has more resources for counterterrorism, surveillance, border protection, and other security policies.
As a result, it has sparked numerous controversies and been criticized for weakening the protection of citizens' civil liberties.	As a result, it enables security to identify terrorist plots on American soil and to prevent attacks before they occur.

Source. Druckman and Leeper (2012).

stead of responding to the public, politicians “simulate responsiveness” and gain support by using issue frames to shift the public’s policy views toward their preferred positions (Druckman and Jacobs 2015; Entman 2004; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

Despite referencing the electoral consequences of issue framing, existing research contains little theoretical guidance as to how frames produce downstream effects on candidate choice. Additionally, prior studies offer limited empirical evidence on the presence and magnitude of these downstream effects. Conventional issue framing experiments conclude by examining differences in the public’s policy preferences and, as a result, are unable to examine the consequences of frames for other political outcomes.

The next section offers a conceptual framework to clarify when framing effects on the public’s issue opinions influence candidate choice. While there are certainly alternative pathways for issue frames to matter even absent large effects on candidate choice, a topic we address in our concluding discussion, studying how frames affect candidate choice focuses attention on a key political outcome. This also links issue framing studies with research on political accountability, which

often focuses on voting decisions in addition to public opinion on individual policies (e.g., Key 1966).

HOW ISSUE FRAMES MATTER FOR CANDIDATE CHOICE

In our account, the downstream effects of issue frames emerge from a two-stage process. In the first stage, as in prior framing studies (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2007b), issue frames change public opinion by shifting the considerations individuals use to evaluate a policy. In the second stage, as in studies of issue voting (e.g., Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008), these changed issue opinions are incorporated into the public’s evaluations of a politician.

In the simplest case, when single-issue voters choose between single-issue candidates only on the basis of policy, the downstream effect of an issue frame on candidate choice would simply be the frame’s initial effect on the public’s policy opinions. However, the relationship between frame-induced opinion change on an issue and that issue’s relevance for candidate choice introduces an additional complication that we consider in figure 1.

The lower portion of figure 1 shows the process described above in which issue frames change policy opinion on an issue and these changed issue preferences influence candidate preferences. Crucially, the figure shows that both processes are moderated by a feature of the framed issue, which we refer to as an *issue weight*. This term refers to the importance of the framed issue for candidate evaluation, something commonly measured in studies of policy voting (e.g., Lenz 2012; Tomz and Van Houweling 2008).

On the one hand, we expect that the impact of frames on issue preferences will be smaller in the case of important issues at the center of candidate choice (as represented by the minus sign next to the downward arrow on the left in fig. 1; see, e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1980; Hovland 1959; Lecheler, de Vreese, and Slothuus 2009). On the other hand, these more salient issues will have a greater influence on candidate choice (as represented by the plus sign next to the downward arrow on the right).

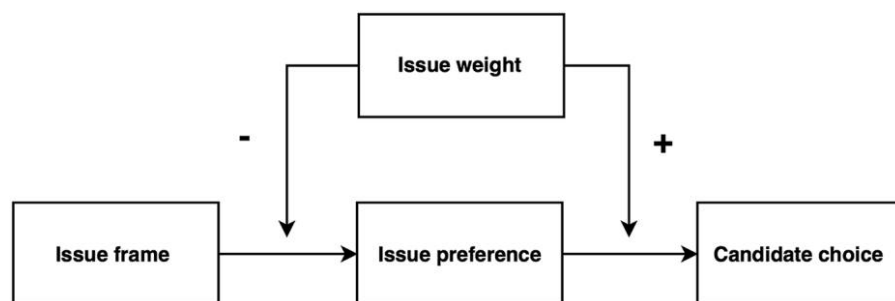


Figure 1. Framing effects on candidate choice

Taken together, this suggests two potential restrictions on the impact of issue frames on candidate choice. First, if no initial framing effects occur on high-salience issues in the first stage of the process, candidate preferences will remain unchanged in the absence of framing-induced shifts in opinion.³ Second, even if large initial framing effects occur, they may still fail to matter for candidate choice if they occur on low-salience issues that lack relevance for later evaluating politicians.

While we intentionally keep our conceptual framework simple, we take note of two additional factors here that we also address empirically in our experiments. First, while figure 1 depicts an issue's importance for candidate evaluations is exogenously given, it is clearly possible for messages to change the relative salience of these issues. Even if exposure to an issue frame fails to change the public's policy opinions, it may still alter the weight individuals place on an issue when evaluating politicians. This process—typically referred to as priming (Iyengar and Kinder 1987)—means even “unsuccessful” issue framing efforts that do not move public opinion have the potential to shift candidate preferences, albeit through a different mechanism than is the focus of prior issue framing studies. Recognizing that, in practice, campaigns simultaneously seek to frame issues and increase an issue's salience for candidate choice, we address this alternative channel by employing a priming manipulation in several studies described in the next section.

Second, while we focus here on a candidate's position on a single issue, candidate choice is multidimensional. Voters can assess politicians on the basis of their positions on several different issues, including issues other than those elites attempt to frame. Moreover, a variety of considerations beyond a candidate's stated position on a previously framed issue, from their partisanship to their profession, factor in to vote choice (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Popkin 1991). To the extent these other considerations matter, the magnitude of a framing effect on a single issue will be attenuated when mapping to candidate preferences. We incorporate this aspect of the candidate evaluation process into our study by providing information about hypothetical candidates that includes both issue positions and other characteristics. We describe the details of our research design in the next section.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Prior framing research demonstrates whether an initial framing effect occurs on public opinion, but the research is unable

3. Below we discuss a potential alternative channel in which exposure to even unsuccessful framing efforts “primes” these issues for candidate evaluation.

to show the consequences of these changed opinions for candidate choice. Studies of candidate evaluation show the effects of the public's issue positions on its candidate preferences (e.g., Ansolabehere et al. 2008; Tomz and Van Houweling 2008), but the studies do not examine the malleability of these issue stances in response to frames.

We remove the divide between these two types of studies by combining a series of framing experiments with candidate choice experiments that employ a paired, forced-choice conjoint design in which respondents choose between two different politicians (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). This approach has several advantages. By integrating framing and candidate evaluation, we directly observe the downstream consequences of elite influence on candidate evaluations in a way that is not feasible in prior studies. By employing issues applicable to both candidate evaluation and issue framing, we examine whether issues that can be effectively framed are also relevant for candidate evaluation in a multidimensional choice environment where other candidate attributes are also visible to survey respondents.

Issue framing experiment

In this design, respondents first encounter frames that support or oppose issues that are relevant for later evaluating congressional candidates. Respondents are randomly assigned to one frame per issue. After receiving a frame, they report their opinion. For frames that effectively shift policy opinions, this will produce opinion differences between respondents in the pro and con frame conditions on an issue. This mirrors the one-sided messaging environments that offer a most likely scenario for frames to affect public opinion (Chong and Druckman 2007a; Sniderman and Theriault 2004).⁴

Table 2 displays information about the seven issues framed in this study. This includes four pairs of frames drawn from prior studies of framing on immigration (Druckman et al. 2013), national security (Druckman and Leeper 2012), trade (Hiscox 2006), and government spending (Sniderman and Theriault 2004). These issues were selected by reviewing earlier experimental framing studies that included both pro and con frames on policies with relevance for position taking by congressional candidates.⁵ In three other cases in which prior studies of issue framing did not include pairs of issue

4. This omits a “control” category in which individuals do not receive frames. This privileges larger downstream effects for framing relative to comparing each framed group to a nonframed set of individuals with opinions in between the pro and con frame groups.

5. Table 2 focuses on prior experimental research examining the effects of frames on public opinion. Many observational studies (e.g., Carmines, Gerrity, and Wagner 2010; Rohlinger 2002) also study the development and effects of frames on issues such as abortion.

Table 2. Issues in Framing Experiments

Issue	Specific Focus	Prior Study
Abortion	Restrict abortion access	No
Education	Support Common Core	No
Immigration	Support DREAM Act	Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013)
Marriage	Support same-sex marriage	No
Security	Support Patriot Act	Druckman and Leeper (2012)
Spending	Increase government spending	Sniderman and Theriault (2004)
Trade	Increase foreign trade	Hiscox (2006)

frames meeting this criterion, we introduced new sets of frames for education, marriage, and abortion policy, to account for the types of high-salience issues common to studies of representation (e.g., Lax and Phillips 2009) but less often featured in experimental political communication research (Hovland 1959).⁶

Candidate choice experiment

After the framing experiment, respondents evaluated candidates for the House of Representatives in a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Respondents saw profiles for a pair of candidates taking positions on two issues framed earlier in the experiment. Each candidate profile also included the candidate's partisanship and two other pieces of biographical information. The available biographical features changed by study but include candidate age, gender, profession, and religion. These biographical details offer a set of non-issue-based considerations for candidate choice and were selected on the basis of their common availability during elections (e.g., through media coverage or voter guides) and their inclusion in prior candidate conjoint experiments (e.g., Hainmueller et al. 2014, 17).⁷ All of these candidate attributes were randomly assigned and varied independently within each candidate profile. This means candidates' issue positions were unrelated to other aspects of their profiles.⁸

Figure 2 is an example profile. This approach offers several advantages for measuring the causal effect of issue frames on candidate choice. The randomized assignment of these different candidate attributes enables clear comparisons of the relative importance of issue frames for candidate choice com-

pared to other candidate features (e.g., a candidate's partisanship or profession) and examines the downstream effects of issue frames in a multidimensional choice setting that also accounts for these other significant candidate attributes.

Findings from conjoint experiments, particularly the paired profile design used here, have a high degree of external validity relative to other experimental approaches when compared to real-world decision making (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015). In this setting, these profiles resemble the voter guides distributed by many media organizations during campaigns (Boudreau, Elmendorf, and MacKenzie 2015; Mummolo and Peterson 2017) and include multiple attributes voters employ when evaluating politicians.

While this approach offers advantages for the internal validity of our findings and relative to other types of experimental designs, it still introduces a necessary trade-off in terms of external validity (e.g., McDermott 2011). In particular, this scenario offers respondents only a few details about the candidates, requires subjects to assess the candidates in a relatively short period of time, and breaks familiar cross-attribute correlations (e.g., between a candidate's partisanship and issue positions) present in real-world settings. These shortcomings are necessary to consider when interpreting this set of experimental results.

Issue priming manipulation

Our theoretical framework takes issue salience as fixed and abstracts away from the possible impact of elite communication on the salience of individual issues for candidate evaluation. However, a frame may also possibly make those policy views more important for evaluating candidates than they otherwise would be. We address this possibility with an additional experimental manipulation included in studies 2 and 3. In these studies subjects were randomly assigned to conditions highlighting the importance of one of the framed issues on which candidates took positions. While we discuss the specifics of these manipulations later, we highlight their role in our study below.

6. Further information about these frames is included in app. A (apps. A-E are available online).

7. Appendix B displays the biographical information available in each study.

8. Because of the focus on issue voting, our only cross-profile restriction to the randomization was that no profile pair could agree on both issues, which would have removed using issue-based criteria for candidate assessment. We show that our findings remain similar when examining only profile pairs that disagreed on both issues, in app. B.

Please carefully review the two candidates for Congress detailed below.

	Candidate A	Candidate B
Gender	Female	Male
Trade Policy	SUPPORTS increased trade with other nations	OPPOSES increased trade with other nations
Party Affiliation	Republican	Democrat
Profession	Lawyer	Professor
Education Policy	OPPOSES Common Core	OPPOSES Common Core

Which of these two candidates would you prefer to see in the United States Congress?

Candidate A



Candidate B



Figure 2. Example candidate choice task: study 2

Incorporating the role of priming in our experiments allows us to study the impact of issue frames in a more realistic environment, mimicking a campaign in which elites simultaneously seek to both change preferences and raise the salience of some issues. Experimentally increasing the salience of one of the issues targeted by our framing experiment also serves the purpose of creating more favorable conditions for downstream effects to occur on that issue.

Data

This overall approach—a series of framing experiments followed by a series of candidate evaluation conjoints—was implemented three times. Table 3 provides an overview of these studies. While largely similar, each study contained slight differences to better examine particular aspects of issue frames' downstream effects.

Study 1 involved a convenience sample of slightly more than 1,000 respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk and offers a broad evaluation of the effects of seven different pairs of pro and con issue frames on the public's policy opinions and evaluations of political candidates. After respondents were exposed to frames on these seven issues, presented in a randomized order, they evaluated pairs of candidates in eight conjoint choice tasks in which the candidates took positions on two of the previously framed issues.

Study 2 enabled a more direct focus on the two strongest issue frame pairs identified in the first study—those for trade and education—on a sample of 1,050 respondents from an online panel maintained by Qualtrics, which was quota sampled to match census benchmarks. Respondents were exposed to two issue frames and then evaluated candidate pairs in four conjoint choice tasks. This study also included a short priming message, emphasizing either the

importance of trade or education policy, before respondents evaluated political candidates.⁹ As in study 1, these candidate profiles offered information about candidate partisanship and two other biographical details, along with allowing respondents to learn the candidates' positions on the previously framed policies.

Finally, study 3 focused again on the consequences of the particularly strong trade and education frames on a nationally representative sample of 3,120 respondents from the GfK panel. Respondents also encountered a much stronger priming manipulation in the form of a news article emphasizing the importance of either the education or trade policy issue for candidate evaluation, before evaluating four pairs of candidates in the conjoint experiment.¹⁰ The large sample size of this last study enables precise estimates of framing effects on both policy opinion and candidate evaluation and helps to allay concerns that a lack of statistical power is responsible for findings in the other two studies.

The use of three different studies offers several benefits. Replication on several samples, including the large and nationally representative sample in study 3, enables greater confidence that the findings presented here are both robust and generalizable. Beyond replication, the three studies complement each other. Study 1 offers a broad perspective across a number of issues. Studies 2 and 3 enable more focused examinations of two particularly powerful sets of issue frames, along with additional messages to further increase the relevance of these framed

9. All respondents received some form of prime. They were randomly assigned to a priming condition with an equal probability of receiving either prime.

10. As in study 2, respondents were randomly assigned to a priming condition with an equal probability of receiving an education or trade prime.

Table 3. Description of Survey Experiments

	Sample Source	Sample Size	No. Framed Issues	No. Conjoint Tasks	Other Treatment
Study 1	Mechanical Turk	1,008	7	8	...
Study 2	Qualtrics	1,050	2	4	Short issue prime
Study 3	GfK	3,120	2	4	Long issue prime

issues for candidate choice. This provides upper bounds on the consequences of framed-induced opinion change and allows precise comparisons of the effects of frames on candidate choice relative to other candidate attributes.

FRAMING EFFECTS ON POLICY OPINION AND CANDIDATE CHOICE

This section examines the downstream effects of issue frames on candidate choice. Our initial analysis addresses two questions. First, to what extent do frames affect policy opinions on these issues? Second, what are the downstream effects of these issue frames on candidate choice? After presenting evidence on these questions, we examine the robustness of these findings to an additional experimental manipulation designed to increase the importance of these framed issues for assessing politicians. This offers a best-case scenario for issue frames to influence candidate choice.

Estimating framing effects on policy opinion

To estimate the effect of issue frames on policy opinion, we compare differences in policy support between individuals in the pro frame and con frame conditions on an issue. We create a dichotomous pro frame variable indicating whether an individual received the pro frame on an issue in the framing experiment. In this specification i indexes respondents and j indexes the different issues examined in the experiments:

$$\text{support policy}_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{pro frame}_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij}.$$

The coefficient on pro frame in this regression captures the difference in policy support between individuals assigned to the pro frame, relative to the con frame, in the framing experiment.

Estimating framing effects on candidate choice

To examine the downstream effects of frames on candidate choice, we use the candidate-issue pair from the conjoint experiment as the unit of analysis. This means each choice task produces four observations (two issues for two candidates). We generate a variable, frame agreement, equal to one if the politician took an issue position that aligned with

the direction of the frame the respondent encountered earlier in the survey and zero if the politician took a position that opposed the frame-supported view a respondent previously encountered.

We regress candidate support on frame agreement to examine the downstream effect of frames on candidate choice. Where i indexes respondents, j indexes issues, and k indexes candidates, we estimate these downstream effects in the following regression:

$$\text{prefer candidate}_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{frame agreement}_{ijk} + \varepsilon_{ijk}.$$

This specification reveals differences in candidate preferences brought about by previously encountering an issue frame that aligned with a candidate's stance, relative to viewing a frame that opposed a candidate's position. Given that the issue frames and candidate positions are randomized independently of each other, this represents the downstream effect of issue frames on the support received by otherwise similar political candidates.

Results

Figure 3 displays the results of this analysis across all three studies. These results are separated by issue and sorted by the magnitude of an issue frame's initial effect on policy opinion. Black circles represent the effect of issue frames on policy opinions. Gray circles indicate the effect of issue frames on candidate preferences. The bars around these circles display 95% confidence intervals (CIs) on these estimates. Because there are multiple observations for each respondent in this portion of the analysis, conventional standard errors may underestimate the uncertainty of these estimates. We follow the recommendation of Hainmueller et al. (2014) and cluster these standard errors by respondent to account for within-subject response dependencies.¹¹

11. This accounts for the mechanical dependence between respondents' candidate choices within each forced-choice pair (i.e., picking one profile means they did not pick the other) and any unobserved respondent characteristics that create dependencies in their responses across different profile pairs (e.g., if they always pick the copartisan candidate when the two candidates in a pair come from opposing parties).

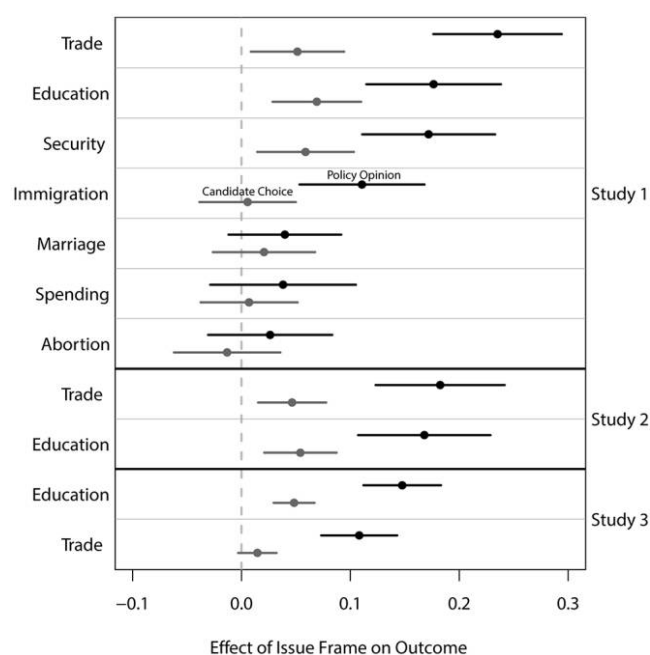


Figure 3. Framing effects on policy opinions (black circles) and candidate choice (gray circles). Effect of pro issue frames on the probability respondents favored a policy, relative to receiving a con issue frame, shown for policy opinion. Probability respondents chose candidates with a position that aligned with the frame they received earlier, relative to candidates with positions that opposed the frame they received earlier, shown for candidate choice. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. For candidate preferences, standard errors are clustered by respondent.

Framing effects on policy opinion

We observe large framing effects on respondents' policy opinions across several issues. These issue framing effects are represented by the black circles and indicate the difference in policy support between respondents who encountered pro and con frames on the issue.

Study 1 replicates previous demonstrations of issue framing effects on trade, security, and immigration policy opinion (Druckman and Leeper 2012; Druckman et al. 2013; Hiscox 2006). On trade policy, individuals exposed to the pro frame condition were 24 percentage points (95% CI [18, 29]) more likely to support increasing trade with other nations compared to those in the con frame condition. We also observe large framing effects on education policy, one of the new issues in the experiment. Here respondents in the pro frame condition were 18 percentage points (95% CI [11, 24]) more likely to support the Common Core education policy compared to those in the con frame condition.

Studies 2 and 3 focus on trade and education policy, the two most effectively framed issues from study 1. Large framing effects on policy opinion also occurred in these studies, although the magnitude of these framing effects is slightly smaller moving from the initial convenience sample to the

other subject pools. For example, in study 3 the framing effects were 15 percentage points (95% CI [11, 18]) on education policy and 11 percentage points (95% CI [7, 14]) on trade policy.

However, not all these issue frames successfully moved policy opinion. For three of the seven issues in study 1, there are limited opinion differences between those assigned to opposing frames. On these issues—same-sex marriage, government spending, and abortion policy—frames fail to detectably shift policy opinion, although the point estimates move in the expected directions. For instance, despite exposure to opposing issue frames on government spending, there was not a statistically significant difference in support for increasing government spending between the pro and con framing groups on that issue (4 percentage points, 95% CI [−3, 11]).

Framing effects on candidate choice

A second point emerging from figure 3 is that even when issue frames produce sizable effects on policy opinion in the initial portion of the experiment, their downstream effects on candidate choice are substantially more limited. The gray circles in figure 3 indicate the downstream effect of issue frames on candidate choice. These circles display the difference in the probability individuals preferred a candidate when that candidate agreed with the frame they received earlier relative to when the candidate took an issue position that opposed the frame they received earlier. This operationalizes our key outcome of interest: the difference in candidate preferences brought about by prior exposure to an issue frame.

In the two most extreme examples, decently sized framing effects on policy opinions toward immigration in study 1 and trade in study 3 fail to produce detectable downstream differences in candidate choice. Exposure to opposing frames led to a 1-percentage-point difference (95% CI [−4, 5]) in candidate support on immigration policy and a 2-percentage-point difference (95% CI [−1, 3]) in candidate support on trade policy. In other words, while the individuals assigned to different frames in the initial portion of these studies went on to hold divergent policy views, this failed to lead them toward different choices when later evaluating political candidates.

Although frames produced detectable differences in candidate evaluation on the other issues for which framing effects on respondent's policy opinions initially occurred, the magnitude of these effects is muted. For example, despite an initial 23-percentage-point difference (95% CI [18, 29]) in policy support between the two framed groups on trade policy in study 1, respondents were only 5 percentage points (95% CI [1, 9]) more likely to support candidates who took a position that aligned with the frame they received earlier

relative to candidates with a position that opposed the frame respondents received before.

A similar pattern occurs in studies 2 and 3. Even substantial opinion shifts in the initial portion of the experiment translated into more modest downstream effects on candidate choice. For education policy, this results in 5-percentage-point effects on candidate choice in both studies (95% CI [2, 9] in study 2 and [3, 7] in study 3). For trade policy, there are framing effects of 4 percentage points on candidate choice in study 2 (95% CI [2, 8]) and 2 percentage points in study 3 (95% CI [-1, 3]).

Summarizing across all the issues included across these three studies, 26% (95% CI [20, 32]) of the initial effect of an issue frame on policy opinion carries over to candidate evaluation.¹² Importantly, these estimates occur in a setting that accounts for other attributes, such as candidate partisanship, which were included in the conjoint profiles (we examine the effects of these other candidate attributes in a later section).¹³

Robustness: Downstream effects when issues are primed

Figure 3 offered an initial examination of the downstream effects of issue frames on candidate choice. We now probe the upper bounds of these downstream effects with an additional manipulation included in study 3 that emphasized the importance of one of the framed issues for evaluating politicians.¹⁴ After individuals encountered frames, but before they evaluated candidates, they read a news article modeled off prior priming experiments (e.g., Hart and Middleton 2014).¹⁵ The article emphasized the importance of considering either trade or education policy, the two issues included in study 3, when evaluating politicians. For our purposes, this offers an even more favorable scenario for issue frames to affect candidate preferences. Not only are respondents exposed to an issue frame, they also receive

a subsequent message highlighting the importance of this issue for candidate choice.

Because of this message, treated respondents became more likely to report the primed issue as important to their candidate preferences in the upcoming election (see app. D for further details). Figure 4 examines the consequences of this manipulation by estimating an issue frame's downstream effect in the primed condition and the unprimed condition and then displays the difference between the two conditions.

Figure 4 demonstrates that even when an additional message emphasizes the relevance of a previously framed issue, there is not a detectable increase in a frame's downstream effect. On education policy, the difference between the effect of framing on candidate preferences in the primed and unprimed conditions is small and close to zero (-.002, 95% CI [-.039, .036]). For trade policy, there is a positive change in the consequences of framing for candidate choice in the primed condition. However, the difference between these two conditions, while positive, is small and indistinguishable from zero at conventional levels of statistical significance (.018, 95% CI [-.017, .054]).

While priming enables elite influence over the underpinnings of candidate evaluations in many settings (e.g., Hart and Middleton 2014; Iyengar and Kinder 1987), here it does not substantially increase the downstream effects of issue frames on candidate evaluation. Even when these issues are highlighted as an important component of candidate evaluation, issue frames continue to have similar downstream consequences for how candidates are evaluated.

Summary: New evidence on frames' downstream effects

This section employed a new experimental design to offer novel evidence on the downstream effects of issue frames. While we replicate prior studies in demonstrating issue framing effects on the public's policy preferences, we also find that issue frames' downstream consequences for candidate choice are substantially more limited than their initial effect on the public's policy opinions. Across these studies, roughly one-fourth of a frame's initial effect on the public's policy preferences carried over to candidate choice. These modest downstream effects persisted even when respondents encountered an article-length treatment emphasizing the importance of a previously framed issue for candidate choice.

We interpret this as evidence for limited or modest downstream effects of issue frames on candidate choice. This interpretation stems from the context in which these effects occur. The settings examined here are conducive to elite influence on policy opinion and, as a result, represent a most

12. This estimate is based on dividing each frame's downstream effect on candidate choice by its effect on the public's policy opinions and averaging across all frame/study pairs.

13. We obtain similar estimates of the effects of issue frames on candidate choice when examining important subsets of the profiles including those with same-party candidates (fig. B1, app. B) and where the candidates disagreed on both issues (fig. B2, app. B).

14. A weaker priming manipulation in study 2 also failed to increase framing effects on candidate choice (see app. D).

15. While priming and framing have similar underpinnings (Druckman, Kuklinski, and Sigelman 2009), we separate them for clarity here. Priming refers to changes in the weights of criteria for candidate evaluation, and framing refers to changes in the considerations used to evaluate policy.

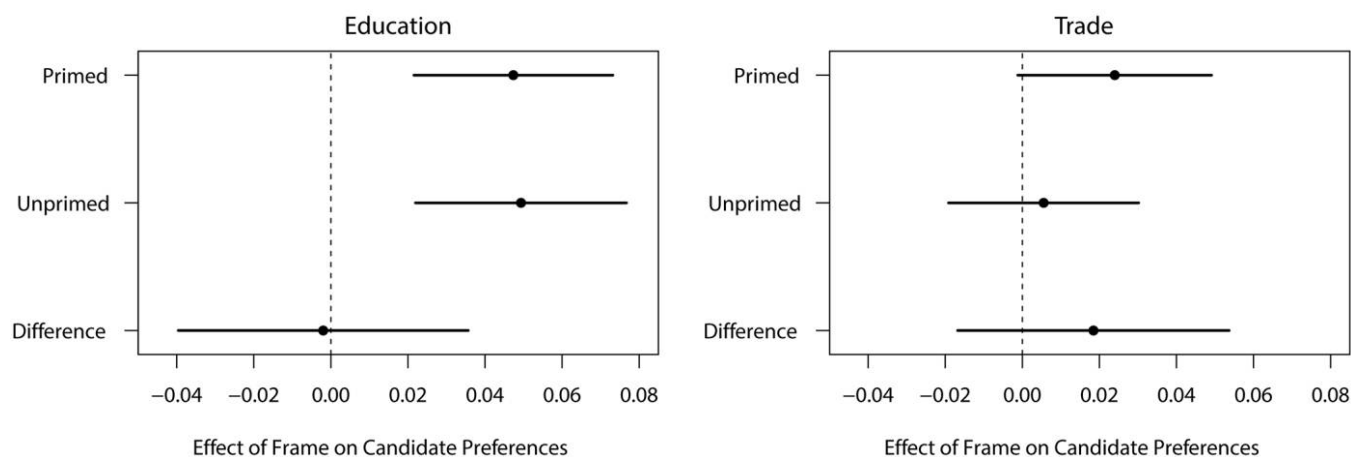


Figure 4. Effect of issue frame agreement on candidate preference in study 3 displayed separately by priming condition, with the difference (primed – unprimed) between the effects of frames on candidates preferences in these two conditions displayed at the bottom of the plot. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals from standard errors clustered by respondent.

likely case for frames to affect candidate choice (Eckstein 1975). Our experiments offered no competition between frames that might reduce their initial effect on policy opinion, examined a contrast between a one-sided messaging environment in favor of an issue position to a one-sided messaging environment opposed to it, minimized effect decay by asking respondents to evaluate candidates immediately after encountering frames, and assessed the downstream effects for a choice between two unknown candidates with whom respondents lacked prior attachments.¹⁶ These effects also occur immediately after individuals reported their issue opinions, potentially amplifying the overall importance of these issues in candidate choice. To the extent that real-world conditions limit the initial scope of elite influence to a “nudge” on policy preferences (Druckman and Jacobs 2015, 16) rather than the substantial opinion shifts examined here, the downstream consequences of frames on candidate choice will decline further.

EXPLAINING THE DOWNSTREAM EFFECTS OF ISSUE FRAMES

The previous section offered new evidence on the magnitude of issue frames’ downstream effects on candidate choice. This section examines this finding in light of our earlier theoretical discussion and illustrates two sources of this disconnect. First, candidate choice is multidimensional, and their opinions on a recently framed issue are only one attribute individuals use to assess politicians. Second, the issues that are most amenable to

issue framing are the least relevant for evaluating politicians. We examine each of these elements in turn.

Multidimensional candidate choice environment

The downstream influence of issue frames on candidate choice occurs in a multidimensional choice environment. In these studies, this meant that in addition to learning political candidates’ positions on two of the recently framed issues, respondents observed the candidates’ partisanship and two pieces of biographical information about each candidate. To the extent these other considerations influence candidate choice, they attenuate the initial effect of an issue frame on the public’s candidate preferences.

To examine this, we compare the magnitude of frames’ downstream framing effects on candidate choice to differences in candidate support produced by other candidate attributes included in the conjoint experiments. As the conjoint experimental design randomized every candidate attribute in the profile, this allows a clear comparison of the causal effects of several different dimensions along which voters might evaluate politicians. Here we focus on study 3, as it includes the two most powerful frames identified across these studies and is the largest and highest-quality sample examined. This allows precise and generalizable comparisons of the effects of these different candidate attributes.¹⁷

In figure 5, we compare the importance of issue frames for candidate support to other candidate features. For each

16. Appendix B shows that effect decay/opinion adjustment does not contribute to these findings.

17. Similar analyses for studies 1 and 2 are available in app. C. Appendix B examines the effects of frames on candidate choice among different subsets of conjoint profiles.

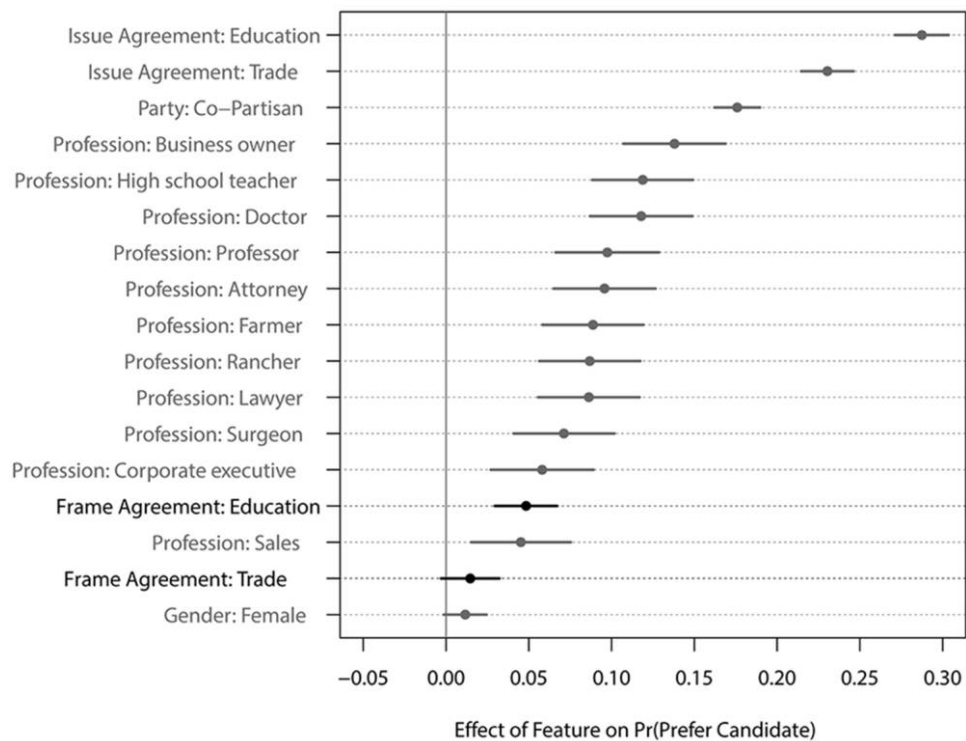


Figure 5. Effect of frames (black circles) and other traits (gray circles) on candidate choice in study 3. For profession, the reference category is “car dealer.” Bars represent 95% confidence intervals from standard errors clustered by respondent.

trait, we estimate a separate regression of candidate support on that trait.¹⁸ We use the lowest support category for a variable as the reference category, so the coefficient estimates are all scaled in terms of the increase a given trait means for candidate support relative to this reference point. For binary variables like frame agreement, the reference category is disagreement with a candidate. For candidate profession, the only multicategory variable, “car dealer,” is used as the reference condition.

To begin, we review the downstream effects of issue frames on education and trade for candidate choice presented in the previous section. These estimates, indicated with black circles in figure 5, represent the difference in a candidate’s support among respondents who received an issue frame that aligned the candidate’s issue position relative to respondents who received an issue frame opposed to the candidate’s stance on the issue.

On education, frame agreement with a candidate produces a 5-percentage-point increase (95% CI [3, 7]) in candidate support. Frame agreement on trade does not produce a detectable effect on candidate choice, with a 1-percentage-point

increase (95% CI [–1, 3]) in candidate support between groups receiving a trade policy frame that agreed with the candidate’s issue position relative to those receiving a policy frame that disagreed with the candidate’s stance.

This comparative analysis helps to place the consequences of issue framing effects for candidate evaluation in context, by demonstrating that frame agreement on the two issues examined in study 3 is less consequential than the effect of many other available candidate traits, indicated with gray circles in figure 5. As a reference point, candidates benefit far more from being a business owner, relative to a car dealer (14 percentage points, 95% CI [11, 17]), than they do from a supportive frame on either issue.

The same pattern holds true for partisan and issue-based candidate considerations. Respondents sharing a party with candidates became 18 percentage points (95% CI [16, 19]) more likely to select them relative to otherwise similar candidates from the out-party. Those who agree with candidates’ education policy stance grow 29 percentage points (95% CI [27, 30]) more likely to support them compared to candidates they disagree with on education.

The lone exception to this pattern occurs for candidate gender, which produces only a 1-percentage-point difference in candidate support (95% CI [–1, 2]), an effect on par with the modest difference that supportive issue frames

18. This allows us to separately estimate the effects of frame agreement and issue agreement, which cannot be included in a single regression without inducing posttreatment bias.

produce in candidate choice (this limited effect of candidate gender corresponds to similar findings in Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth [2018]).

This illustrates how the multidimensional nature of candidate choice contributes to the modest downstream consequences of issue frames. Even large framing effects on issue opinion are attenuated when moving to candidate choice because of the other criteria available for deciding between politicians. This also benchmarks the magnitude of framing effects on candidate choice relative to other candidate attributes and shows that several of these other attributes have a more pronounced relationship with candidate choice.

Framing effect magnitude and issue importance in candidate choice

A second potential source of limitations stems from the relationship between the importance of an issue for candidate evaluation and the extent to which frames can change policy opinion on that issue. Even if issue frames produce substantial shifts in the public's policy opinions, if the types of issues amenable to framing receive a low salience in candidate evaluation it limits the magnitude of the downstream effects of frames on candidate choice.

We now examine this relationship within each issue included in study 1. We focus on study 1 because it contains the widest range of issues and to remove heterogeneity due to the different samples and manipulations used in the other two studies.¹⁹ Estimates of the effect of issue frames on policy opinion are obtained using the method used to produce figure 3. To estimate an issue's importance for candidate evaluation, we generate an issue agreement in the conjoint experiment data that equals one if individuals agree with the issue position a candidate takes and zero if they disagree with the issue position a candidate takes. We then regress candidate support on issue agreement for each issue examined in the three studies. In the specification below, β_1 indicates an issue's weight in candidate choice and operationalizes how important an issue is in these experiments for deciding between politicians:

$$\text{prefer candidate}_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{issue agreement}_{ijk} + \varepsilon_{ijk}.$$

Figure 6 compares framing effects and issue weights for each of the issues examined in the study. An issue's position on the x -axis indicates its weight in candidate evaluation. The higher on this axis, the more important issue agreement is for candidate choice. The y -axis shows the magnitude of the framing effect on the issue. The higher a point

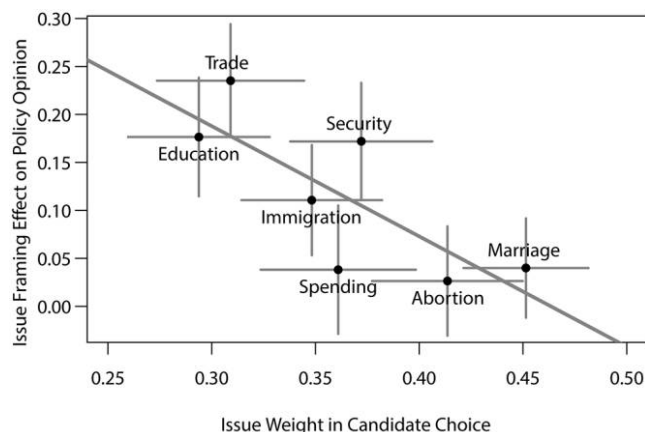


Figure 6. Comparing framing effects and candidate choice weights by issue. Relationship between the size of the framing effect on an issue (y -axis) and the weight the issue receives in candidate choice in the conjoint experiment (x -axis) in study 1. Line of best fit from a regression of framing effect size on issue weight by issue pair is shown in gray.

is on this axis, the more malleable policy opinion on that issue was in response to frames.

Figure 6 reveals a strong negative relationship between the framing effect on an issue and that issue's relevance for candidate choice ($r = -.8$). For instance, the largest issue framing effects occur on trade and education policy. Relative to the other issues, these two receive less prominence as a determinant of candidate choice. In contrast, other issues such as government spending, marriage policy, and abortion are more important in respondents' evaluations of political candidates but are less amenable to framing.²⁰

This pattern of findings highlights a second source of limits to the downstream consequences of issue framing. High-prominence issues for candidate evaluation resist attempts at framing. In contrast, the issues on which issue framing effects did occur have less prominence in candidate choice. This relationship is in line with prior accounts in which the public's policy opinions resist elite influence on salient or "easy" issues at the center of political debates (Bechtel et al. 2015; Hovland 1959; Lecheler et al. 2009; Peterson and Simonovits 2017). While issue frames can produce shifts in opinion on a number of reasonably important issues for candidate evaluation, the trade-off we identify here contributes to the limited downstream effects of issue frames for candidate choice.

CONCLUSION

This article introduced a theoretical framework for understanding how issue frames produce downstream effects on

19. Analyses that incorporate studies 2 and 3 are available in app. B.

20. This negative relationship remains even among issues from previous studies only ($r = -.6$). Appendix B further examines this relationship.

candidate choice. Combining framing and candidate evaluation experiments, we directly assessed the downstream effects of issue frames. This examination revealed modest downstream effects of issue frames on candidate choice. Additionally, messages designed to increase the salience of these previously framed issues for candidate choice failed to magnify issue frames' consequences for candidate choice.

Our account points to two aspects of candidate evaluation that create a disconnect between the effects of frames on issue opinions and their more limited implications for candidate choice. First, in the multidimensional candidate choice setting the consequences of frame-induced opinion change were often outweighed by other factors, such as a candidate's partisanship or occupation. Second, the issues most amenable to framing in these experiments were also the least relevant issues for deciding between politicians.

While prior issue framing research focuses on identifying the political contexts in which framing effects on the public's policy opinions can occur, this study shows that even in instances in which issue frames successfully shape public opinion, they can still have limited downstream consequences for other political outcomes. For the array of studies that consider the implications of issue framing effects on the public's policy opinions for democratic accountability and representation (e.g., Bartels 2003; Druckman 2014; Entman 1993; Jacobs and Shapiro 2000), this direct examination shows the need to carefully consider the political outcome of interest and the type of issue being framed when assessing the broader implications of issue framing effects. In particular, this study shows that even large changes in the public's policy opinions due to frames may ultimately have limited consequences for its subsequent political decision making, in this case as operationalized by candidate choice.

In closing, we also highlight two limitations of our study and point to opportunities for further research on the downstream effects of frames. First, while candidate choice is a central political behavior, opinion change in the electorate could prove politically consequential through other channels. Public support for a policy, even absent substantial electoral implications, may affect elite-level policy making (Druckman and Jacobs 2015, 16; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Kernell 1986). Moreover, in the case of ballot initiatives when the public directly weighs in on policy, issue framing effects should be more likely to directly translate into subsequent political outcomes. Future research should expand its focus to explore the downstream effect of frames through these channels.

Second, in our interpretation of the magnitude of downstream effects found in our experiments, we benchmarked these effects to other quantities found in the context of our

studies. For instance, we argued that the electoral effect of frames is small compared to their effects on policy preferences or the impact of other candidate characteristics. The stylized nature of our experimental studies (e.g., fictional candidates with randomized policy positions) allows us to estimate these causal effects in a controlled setting but also makes it difficult to gauge the potential downstream effect of frames in real-world elections in which voters may potentially encounter a much wider array of candidate information over a longer period of time. We believe that additional studies that explore the downstream impact of frames in more realistic settings are sorely needed for a full understanding of their consequences.

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