The Self-Interested Public: Understanding the Role of Personal Interest in Americans' Policy Preferences

BY

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This research features a multi-method approach to study how self-interest affects people’s policy preferences. Seven different studies explore the influence of people’s individual interests on attitudes toward a variety of tax, health care, and immigration policies.

In-depth interviews were conducted with fifty participants to examine how people think about public policies. The interviews illustrate the relationships between people’s beliefs about policies, personal interest and preferences.

Three sets of survey data were analyzed to study the direct and indirect effects of people’s self-interest on their preferences. The results demonstrate that people’s personal interest influences their attitudes both directly and through interactions with factors such as political partisanship or ideology.

Three sets of survey framing experiments were conducted to measure the effects of messages appealing to people’s individual interest on their policy preferences. The experiments provide evidence of how self-interest frames can lead to changes in people’s political attitudes.

Collectively these studies illustrate the significant influence of self-interest on attitudes and public opinion in American democracy.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Understanding how the American public thinks about and develops attitudes and preferences towards political policies is a key part of understanding American democracy. Researchers and politicians are both interested in policy attitudes and preferences because public opinion can have a strong impact on both media coverage of political issues and on the policymaking process. Elected officials have long tried to gauge the attitudes of their constituents toward public policies, and politicians’ often monitor public opinion polls about different issues (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Stimson 2004; Entman 2004). This occurs in part because politicians want to be responsive to public sentiment on issues, but also because politicians seek to influence public perceptions of and options toward policies (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000; Entman 2004).

Public sentiment often affects what issues rise to the top of the government agenda and receive attention from lawmakers and the media (Kingdon 1984; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Entman 2004; Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

Although the relationship between public opinion and policy making is complex, changes in public support or opposition for certain policies can lead to shifts in lawmakers’ positions and new public policies (Page and Shapiro 1983; Jacobs 1993; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Stimson et al. 1995). For example, one could argue that increasing public support for gay marriage in recent years has led many lawmakers to openly support the policy and has helped spur the legalization of gay marriage in several states. Furthermore, electoral politics research suggests that policy preferences influence vote choices as well, specifically that people vote for candidates who have policy preferences that are most similar to their own (Nie et al. 1976; Page
and Jones 1979; Alvarez and Nagler 1995; Abramowitz and Sanders 1998; Carsey and Layman 2006).

With the importance of public opinion in American democracy, many studies have explored how people develop attitudes toward political policies and why people prefer one proposed policy more than another. Much of this research in political science has long focused on the influence of people’s political identifications and values. Studies dating back to the 1960s show that people’s partisanship and ideological beliefs are strong predictors of attitudes about a wide array of policies (Campbell et al. 1960; Key 1965). Research has also demonstrated the effects on preferences of factors such as political awareness and knowledge (Zaller 1992; Lupia and McCubbins 1998), social pressures (Noelle-Neumann 1984) news sources or political campaigns (Graber 1984; Popkin 1991), and changing circumstances or government policies (Page and Shapiro 1992; Stimson 2004).

However, one issue that has received little attention in public opinion studies in the last decade is self-interest. The term self-interest refers broadly to the costs and/or benefits of a policy to an individual. For centuries, political philosophers and theorists speculated on how people’s self-interest influences their attitudes and decisions. Likewise, rational choice theories popular during the 1960s and 1970s in political science focused on how people’s individual interests influenced their beliefs and behaviors (Downs 1957; Olson 1965). However, many social science and rational choice theories were challenged during the late 1970s and 1980s (Sen 1977; Mansbridge 1990), and research during this era largely supported the conclusion that self-interest has little impact on people’s policy preferences. Several notable studies of self-interest during the 1980s and 1990s found self-interest had little impact on preferences compared with factors such as ideology, partisanship and racial tolerance (Sears and Funk 1991). This notion
that self-interest has little influence on preferences has been relatively widely accepted in political science, and there has been little research into the effects of self-interest on policy attitudes in the last decade.

This dissertation challenges the conclusion of past research that self-interest is largely irrelevant to understanding people’s policy preferences. Previous studies have primarily tested the impact of self-interest on policy preferences using closed-ended questions asked in cross-sectional surveys and have examined the direct effects of self-interest on policy preferences controlling for other factors like party identification and political ideology. However, this research has several key weaknesses: 1) It conceptualized and measured self-interest simply and often incompletely (typically using a single dichotomous question designed to capture “objective” self-interest in a policy domain). In addition, in many cases, the measures of self-interest that were used lacked face validity; 2) It considered only the direct effects of these simple measures of self-interest on policy preferences and did not consider more complex ways that self-interest may influence policy preferences; and 3) By relying largely on analysis of cross-sectional data which does not provide a strong evidence of causality, this research did not consider how elites and politicians try to influence policy preferences through persuasive messages and framing of issues that focuses on self-interest.

This dissertation addresses these limitations and develops a more comprehensive approach to study the effects of self-interest on preferences. The research features seven studies that use three different methods to explore the impact of self-interest on attitudes toward tax, health care, and immigration policies. In Chapter 1, in-depth interviews are used to assess how people with different characteristics think about their self-interest, and how these characteristics and beliefs relate to policy preferences and past assumptions about self-interest. These interviews
provide evidence that the approach taken in past research is overly simplistic and that subjective and objective self-interest are distinct constructs. Building on this evidence, the three studies presented in Chapter 2 use survey analysis to demonstrate the distinct influences of objective and subjective self-interest on policy preferences. These studies also provide evidence that self-interest can moderate and mediate the effects of political ideology and partisanship on people’s policy preferences. Like past research, the evidence in Chapters 1 and 2 is based on cross-sectional research and therefore does not provide the strongest evidence that self-interest causes policy attitudes and preferences. In Chapter 3, three survey framing experiments directly test whether frames designed to manipulate self-interest influence policy attitudes and preferences. The results show that messages appealing to people’s self-interest can have significant effects on their preferences.

These three chapters combine to provide a new approach to studying self-interest that is more complete than past research. Previous studies of self-interest use close-ended surveys to compare the direct effects of objective self-interest on preferences with the direct effects of other factors such as ideology or partisanship. In contrast, this dissertation features a multi-method approach to explain the complex relationships between objective self-interest, subjective self-interest, political values and policy preferences. The approach illustrates the direct effects of self-interest on attitudes and shows self-interest moderates and mediates the effects of political values/beliefs on preferences. In addition, survey-framing experiments demonstrate that self-interest can directly cause changes in attitudes. Together these three chapters provide strong evidence that researchers were premature in dismissing the importance of self-interest in understanding Americans’ policy preferences.
B. Past Studies

Many political philosophers have recognized the potential for self-interest to influence individual attitudes and democratic governments (Mansbridge 1990). Thomas Hobbes identified self-interest as a fundamental driving motive for individuals and argued people’s pursuit of self-interest can lead to cooperation. Adam Smith contended people acting in their self-interest were essential for economic prosperity within a society. America’s founding fathers discussed the need to both inhibit and suppress self-interest in a representative democratic society. More recently, rational choice scholars such as Anthony Downs developed political attitude and behavior theories based on people acting in their own interest (Downs 1957).

However, during the 1970s and 1980s when rational choice theories were challenged across the social sciences, research found self-interest to have little influence on policy preferences (Mansbridge 1990). Instead, several studies found symbolic politics variables such as ideology, partisanship, and racial tolerance had the most significant impact on preferences. In a review of the literature, Sears and Funk (1990) explain that partisanship, ideology and racial tolerance are “political symbols (that) evoke longstanding affective responses rather than rational self-interested calculations” (p. 149). They contend that these symbolic predispositions “can be shown to have been relatively stable through most individuals’ adult life spans, and so are unlikely to be substantially influenced by the individual’s short-term material self-interest in adulthood” (p. 149). Most previous studies contrast symbolic politics to self-interest, which they define as “the (1) short-to-medium term impact of an issue (or candidacy) on the (2) material well-being of the (3) individual’s own person life (or that of his or her immediate family)” (p. 148). This framework served as the foundation for most of the studies dismissing the impact of self-interest on preferences during the late 1970s and early 1980s.
In one of the first studies to use the symbolic politics approach, Lau et al. (1978) analyzed 1968 ANES survey data on people’s attitudes toward the Vietnam War. They compared the effects of both self-interest (having a friend or relative in the war) and symbolic attitudes (conservatism, anticommunism, attitude toward military and attitude toward antiwar protestors). They found “the more important determinants of attitudes toward the war were symbolic attitudes toward various political symbols associated with the war” and “self-interested civilians responded politically to the war principally on a symbolic basis, just as did disinterested civilians” (p. 479). They concluded “our results suggest that it is the symbolic meaning of an issue, rather than its personal impact, that is critical to the crystallization of public opinion on it” (p. 481).

Sears et al. (1979) analyzed 1972 ANES data to compare the impacts of self-interest (busing, child and racial composition of neighborhood) and symbolic politics (racial tolerance and conservatism) on whites’ attitudes toward school busing. They find with opposition to busing “both racial intolerance and political conservatism had strong effects, while none of the self-interest variables had an effect even approaching statistical significance” (p. 374). They conclude, “symbolic political attitudes predict antibusing attitudes quite strongly, while self-interest has no significant effect” (p. 374).

Sears et al. (1980) is one of the most cited self-interest studies. They analyzed 1976 ANES presidential election survey data to compare the effects of self-interest and symbolic attitudes (partisanship, ideology and racial prejudice) on unemployment, medical insurance, school busing and crime policies. They find “self-interest to have little effect on voters policy preferences while symbolic attitudes had major effects” (p. 673). In particular, only four of thirteen self-interest indicators had statistical significance while all symbolic attitude variables
had significance, some such as ideology quite strong. The authors conclude “the basic finding is that symbolic attitudes are main predictors of respondents’ policy attitudes; self-interest contributes own trivially” (p. 674).

Sears and Citrin (1982) further highlighted the importance of symbolic politics. Using survey data from California, they found owning a home led people to support property tax cuts and public-sector employees opposed cuts to their wages or jobs. However, they found partisanship, ideology and symbolic racism had more impact than self-interest on policy preferences. They asserted “that symbolic predispositions contribute much more to schematic thinking than does self-interest” and “these findings suggest once more that self-interest plays a narrow and encapsulated role in the American mass public’s political attitudes” (p. 213).

In the last two decades, several studies have used the symbolic politics approach and confirmed the earlier findings dismissing the influence of self-interest. Citrin et al. (1997) analyzed ANES data to study people’s views about if the number of immigrants should be increased/decreased and whether immigrant should receive government benefits. They found “ideology and affective orientations toward particular ethnic groups had persistent links to opinions about the level of immigration and the access of immigrants to government benefits” and conclude “this policy domain constitutes another case in which narrow self-interest is not a significant influence on preference formation” (p. 874). Likewise, Lau and Heldman (2009) dismissed the influence of self-interest on policy preferences when studying preferences for government health insurance and guaranteed jobs/income on ANES surveys from 1972-2004. The authors concluded that in regards to self-interest, “the basic story has not changed in the quarter century since [Sears et al. 1980] first explored the topic” (p. 534).
C. Limitations of Past Studies

The symbolic politics approach likely underestimates the influence of self-interest on people’s policy preferences and has several major weaknesses. Most past studies used measures of self-interest with limited validity, did not examine the interaction between self-interest and political dispositions, and did not account for elite messaging/framing. Moreover, in the few studies that self-interest had been found to exert a strong influence on preferences, the issue areas were often narrow and lacked strong external validity.

Most previous research relied primarily on objective measures of self-interest and did not explore the extent to which policy preferences reflect people’s subjective self-interests. Objective measures of self-interest are quantifiable factors or characteristics that researchers assume indicate a person has an interest in a policy. For example, Sears et al. (1980) use having a child to be bused as a measure of self-interest in opposing busing, and they use not having health insurance as a measure of self-interest in supporting national health care. However, these objective measures of self-interest could be different and less valid than people’s subjective self-interest, which is how people believe the policy will help/hurt them. Sears and Funk (1990) acknowledged that with their approach “one criticism is that it has relied too heavily on objective measures of self-interest, which may be insensitive to self-interest as the individual voter perceives it” (p. 166).

Several studies have shown that subjective interests may better predict policy preferences than objective interests. Chong (2000) highlighted the importance of subjective self-interest in people’s preferences toward issues such as economic development. He demonstrated how subjective self-interest could include social incentives, and not just material incentives. Tedin et al. (2001) analyzed a post-election survey of voters in a 1996 Houston school referendum
featuring both objective measures of self-interest (children attend district) and subjective measures of self-interest (believe new school will be built in their neighborhood and size of perceived tax increase). They found subjective self-interest had a larger impact on preferences than objective self-interest or symbolic variables (ideology, partisanship, political trust, equalitarianism and racial resentment). These studies illustrate the benefit of studying people’s subjective self-interest.

Past research set self-interest and symbolic politics in opposition, but there could be an interaction between self-interest and symbolic politics. Erikson and Stoker (2011) showed self-interest in the Vietnam draft lottery impacted some people’s long-term political predispositions. In addition, motivated reasoning theory posits variables such as ideology and partisanship influence people’s evaluation and understanding of policies (Lodge and Hamill 1986; Taber 2003; Lodge and Taber 2005). Research also shows self-interest can impact the effects of partisanship on attitudes toward health care and social welfare policies (Henderson and Hillygus 2011; Margalit 2013). For example, strong Republicans worried about their health care were less likely to change their opinions to oppose health care reform in response to elite debate over the Affordable Care Act than were strong Republicans not worried about their health care, a relationship not present among Democrats (Henderson and Hillygus 2011). These studies demonstrate self-interest could moderate or mediate the effects of other factors on preferences.

Most previous self-interest research did not account for the possibility of elite messaging making people’s self-interest more clear or salient. However, a couple of past studies demonstrate the potential for information to impact the effects of self-interest on preferences. Sears and Lau (1983) found placing questions about people’s personal financial situation on a survey before questions about economic policies led self-interest to have more impact on
attitudes. Likewise, Chong et al. (2001) showed that asking respondents to think about how
issues such as mortgage tax deductions would affect them led their policy preferences to be more
consistent with their self-interest than people who did not receive the questions. They concluded
that researchers “need to explore how the behavior of politicians and the media can modify the
link between the objective circumstances and perceptions of self-interest and elevate or diminish
the power of self-regarding motives” (p. 564).

Several studies that have showed self-interest plays an important role in public attitudes
featured issues with limited external validity. Self-interest had a strong impact on attitudes
toward smoking restrictions (Green and Gerken 1989), alcohol regulations (Crowe and Bailey
1995), and gun control (Wolpert and Gimpel 1998). However, these studies lack strong external
validity because they feature issues in which individuals have very strong personal
consumption/hobby interests. Moreover, these studies do not demonstrate how self-interest may
impact preferences toward issues in which self-interest is not as clearly defined.

D. Research Design

In order to develop a more comprehensive approach to studying self-interest, this
research uses multiple methods to explore self-interest across three different policy areas. The
dissertation examines the effects of self-interest on attitudes toward a variety of tax, health care,
and immigration policies. These three issue areas are highly salient in American politics and
have received significant attention from the media and politicians in the last several years. While
past research showing significant effects of self-interest have used less partisan/ideological
issues such as smoking or alcohol regulations, these policy areas are highly divisive political
issues in which partisan elites have taken opposing views. In addition, previous studies have
shown the effects of self-interest on preferences differ across these issues. Self-interest has had a significant impact on attitudes toward tax policies (Sears and Citrin 1982; Sears and Funk 1991), some effect on health care preferences (Sears et al. 1980; Sears and Funk 1991; Lau and Heldman 2009) and little influence on immigration policy attitudes (Sears and Funk 1991; Citrin et al. 1997).

Chapter 1 features the results of in-depth interviews showing how people conceive of their self-interest and the relationships between objective self-interest, subjective self-interest, and policy preferences. The chapter includes an analysis of fifty respondents who were each interviewed about twelve different policy proposals (four tax policies, four health care policies, and four immigration policies). The respondents expressed a preference for each policy in a manner similar to close-ended surveys used in past studies. However, open-ended questions allowed respondents to explain whom they thought each policy would affect, and how it would or would not impact them personally. The interviews, which lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes, provide a more thorough understanding of how people perceive their self-interest and how these conceptions factor into people’s decision making than past research.

Chapter 2 presents survey analysis highlighting the direct effects of self-interest on preferences and the interactions between subjective self-interest, objective self-interest, and symbolic politics variables. The chapter features analyses of three different data sets: 1) a 2008 Chicago area-survey with questions about attitudes toward the Iraq War, school funding, gentrification, affirmative action, and immigration; 2) a 2010 Chicago-area survey about preferences toward multiple immigration policies; and 3) multiple national surveys conducted in 2011 and 2012 about attitudes toward the Affordable Care Act. The three studies illustrate
differences between objective and subjective self-interest and provide evidence that self-interest can moderate and mediate the effects of symbolic politics variables across an array of issues.

Chapter 3 features survey-framing experiments to show how messages appealing to people’s self-interest can influence their policy preferences. The chapter includes three different sets of studies: 1) framing experiments included in an April 2013 exit poll survey of 1,000 registered voters in three Chicago-area suburbs (Des Plaines, Elmhurst and Maywood); 2) framing experiments included on two 1,100-respondent surveys conducted online with Amazon Mechanical Turk in February and March 2014; 3) framing experiments included on a 1,600-respondent survey conducted online with Amazon Mechanical Turk in May 2014. The results illustrate the effects of self-interest messages in both a standalone and competitive message context and across an array of different policies and arguments.

The multi-method approach of this dissertation aims to alleviate some of the weaknesses of past studies of self-interest and develop a more complete understanding of how self-interest influences people’s attitudes. The research combines qualitative data (in-depth interviews), quantitative data (analysis of surveys), and experimental data (survey framing experiments), and the comprehensive approach provides evidence of how people conceive of their self-interest, how self-interest interacts with other variables, and how appeals to self-interest can affect preferences.
II. THE MEANING OF SELF IN SELF-INTEREST

A. Background

In survey research conducted over several decades, self-interest has been found to be significantly less influential than political predispositions such as partisanship, political ideology, and racial attitudes in shaping people’s policy attitudes (Sears et al. 1980; Sears and Funk 1991; Lau and Heldman 2009). These studies established a theoretical framework in public opinion research that viewed symbolic politics as an alternative explanatory model to self-interest.

However, studies indicating the dominance of symbolic politics have several limitations that have potentially led scholars to underestimate the influence of self-interest on public opinion. Foremost is that most past studies test objective measures of self-interest, which will have limited explanatory power when the effects of policies are unclear or unknown to people. Focusing solely on objective self-interest excludes the possibility that people disagree about the effects of policies, but are nonetheless psychologically rational in reasoning from means to ends given the beliefs they hold about the world.

In this chapter, I use in-depth interviews to explore further the role of both objective and subjective self-interest in explaining policy preferences. By featuring people’s reasoning processes, the interviews provide an alternative to the standard close ended-survey items used in past self-interest research. The findings in this chapter are based on fifty interviews, which I use to examine the source of objective and subjective interests, their relationship to each other, and the conditions affecting the relative influence of self-interest and symbolic values on people’s policy attitudes.

The in-depth interviews provide insights into how people define their subjective self-
interest. They show that people hold highly variable beliefs about how policies will affect them personally, and that such beliefs account for the discrepancy between objective and subjective self-interest. People discuss policies using “causal scripts” drawn from experience and learning that provide explanations for the origins and effects of public policy. These scripts reveal that for certain types of policies involving well-defined personal or group interests, people are indeed more likely to recognize and follow their objective interests. But, more generally, subjective self-interests go beyond narrowly defined objective interests to take account of membership in larger groups, non-material benefits, and longer term benefits that rely on projections of one’s future states.

People’s subjective self-interests, so defined, are highly correlated with their policy preferences: when people give reasons why a policy will make them better or worse off, their attitudes toward the policy are usually consistent with their beliefs. But it is noteworthy that people do not claim to have a personal interest in every issue, which might be the case if subjective self-interest were merely a rationalization for preferences. Providing a role for subjective self-interest therefore does not result in a tautological explanation in which every choice is said to be preferred because it furthers one’s subjective self-interest.

B. Measurement Issues with Past Studies

Since the late 1970s, a number of studies using survey data have concluded that symbolic values dominate self-interest in shaping attitudes toward issues such as the Vietnam War (Lau et al. 1978), school busing (Sears et al. 1979; Sears et al. 1980), health care (Sears et al. 1980; Lau and Heldman 2009), taxes (Sears and Citrin 1982), and immigration (Citrin et al. 1997). Sears and Funk (1991) conclude that self-interest has little influence on policy preferences because
people often do not have a significant and clear stake in a policy, and they cannot trace the impact of abstract policies on their daily lives. Thus, the smaller subset of studies that have found significant self-interest effects involve well defined and sometimes substantial costs and benefits (e.g. cigarette taxes on smokers and gun regulations on gun owners), causing individuals in affected groups to protect their interests (Green and Gerken 1989; Crowe and Bailey 1995; Wolpert and Gimpel 1998).

Most of the symbolic politics research relies on measures of self-interest from closed-ended survey questions that measure objective characteristic or circumstances and do not account for people’s subjective perceptions of their interests. Objective measures of self-interest are based on the researcher’s analysis of the categories of individuals who will be most affected by the implementation of a policy. For example, Sears et al. (1980) consider having a child who might be bused to be an indicator of self-interest in opposing busing; similarly, not having health insurance is assumed to be a measure of self-interest in supporting national health care. These objective measures of self-interest, however, may not correspond to people’s subjective self-interest, which is based on their beliefs about the impact of a policy on themselves. Parents conceivably could view supporting busing as in their self-interest if they believe the policy will allow their child to go to a better school. People without health insurance could believe opposing national health care is in their self-interest because they feel the government will force them to pay for care they do not want or need. Several studies indicate that subjective self-interest can differ from objective interest and may have greater impact on policy preferences than objective self-interest. Crano (1997) demonstrates subjective self-interest is more influential on preferences toward school busing than objective self-interest. Tedin et al. (2001) show that subjective interests can better predict support for school funding than can objective interests.
In addition, many past studies likely employ unreliable measures of self-interest because they assume that people who are not beneficiaries of a policy will have self-interest in opposing it (Crano 1997). The typical test of self-interest is to contrast the views of beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries when, in actuality, non-beneficiaries are likely to be a heterogeneous group with diverse interests in the policy.

Lastly, many previous studies place self-interest and symbolic politics in opposition, but research shows that both factors likely influence policy preferences, sometimes in a complementary fashion. Erikson and Stoker (2011) find that a clear and substantial self-interest in an issue – namely, a person’s status in a military draft lottery -- can change not only one’s views on that policy but also more fundamental political predispositions such as partisanship. In his study of attitudes toward school funding, Tedin (1994) concludes: “Affective variables (core values) influence the perceptions of reality necessary for a rational self-interest calculation” (p. 644). Likewise, Gerber and Huber (2009) find people in the President’s party expect better future economic performance than opposing partisans and spend more money than opposing partisans. These studies illustrate the need to further explore how self-interest and predispositions interact to influence people’s attitudes and behavior.

C. Psychological Rationality

Most previous symbolic politics research comparing objective self-interest to symbolic values tests two models of attitude formation: a symbolic model that is centered on affective reactions to cues versus a narrowly defined version of rational choice. The political symbolism model assumes people’s policy preferences are based primarily on stable, enduring predispositions such as political ideology, partisanship and racial tolerance. Politics and policies
are said to be framed using symbols designed to trigger affective associations. People interpret events and form preferences based on their emotional response to these symbols.

A narrowly defined rational actor model assumes people’s policy preferences are based on their objective self-interest. People have complete information about how policies will affect them, and they prefer the policy that will have the largest material benefit immediately or in the proximate future. Empirical research, however, has shown that people generally pay little attention to politics and that shortcomings of knowledge and uncertainty make it difficult for people to predict how public policies will affect them. This critique has merit, but has not generated research exploring the possibility that people are instrumentally rational in psychological terms. If people do not possess accurate beliefs about the effects of public policy, what do they believe will be the consequences of such policies, and how do these beliefs influence their preferences?

My emphasis in this chapter on subjective constructions of reality is consistent with psychological models of bounded rationality. In this view, people develop reasonable if not substantively rational preferences given incomplete information, limits on time, ability, and motivation, and uncertainty about outcomes (Simon 1995; Conlisk 1996; Rubinstein 1998). Time and information constraints lead people to use “causal scripts” to explain the effects of policies. Causal scripts help people organize their knowledge and beliefs about government and policies into coherent accounts of the political world (Fiske and Taylor 1984; Graber 1984; Lodge and Hamill 1986). Causal scripts are similar to cognitive concepts such as schemas or policy narratives (Sears and Citrin 1982; Popkin 1991), and they derive from education, personal experience and knowledge, ideological values, and conventional wisdom or happenstance. People’s conceptions of politics are embedded in these causal scripts, which provide an
explanation of how a policy might affect oneself as well as the larger society. A person’s causal
script (and by implication his subjective self-interest) can have a solid evidentiary foundation
based on reliable information about the features of the policy, or it can be highly intuitive and
speculative reflecting generalizations about government and human behavior. Presumably,
variations in knowledge, experience, and values can help explain when and why people’s
subjective self-interest differs from their objective self-interest.

In short, we assume people’s beliefs about how policies affect them derive not only from
the objective features of the policy but also from their values, predispositions, personal
experiences, and knowledge. Therefore, political predispositions and objective circumstances
influence people’s subjective perceptions and interpretations of policies. People do not base their
policy preferences exclusively on objective terms, and they do not simply respond affectively to
political symbols. Instead, people use causal scripts that contain assumptions about the
motivations and goals of politicians and government to understand the consequences of policies
for themselves and other members of society.

D. **In-depth Interviews**

I conducted fifty interviews between July 31, 2014 and December 11, 2014 with
participants drawn from Chicago civic and political organizations such as the League of Women
of Voters and Taxpayers United of America. The participants ranged in age from 23 years old to
93 years old, and the median age was 50. A fifth of the sample came from each of the following
age brackets: 23-29, 30-46, 46-57, 58-68, and 69-93. Self-reported annual household incomes
ranged from $25,000 to more than $4,000,000, with a median of $97,000. The sample included
twenty-seven women and twenty-three men, and consisted of thirty-four Democrats, five
Republicans, and eleven Independents. The sample was highly educated, as only five individuals did not have a college degree, and twenty-four individuals had earned an advanced degree. Although the sample is not intended to be representative of the broader population, it features people with varying ideologies and backgrounds, and is adequate for to develop and apply a systematic methodology for understanding subjective self-interest. Moreover, an analysis in Appendix III shows that income, education, and politically ideology were not strongly associated with the key dependent variables in the study.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and on average, took about 75 minutes. All of the interviews featured a series of questions about health care (Medicare, Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act), taxes (sales, income, capital gains, property), and immigration policies (scholarships, local police enforcement, work visas, path to citizenship). The questionnaire was revised after a dozen pre-test interviews in March 2013, and all the interviews were structured by the questionnaire in Appendix I.

The interviews followed a sequence of questions for each policy issue (and for each of the policy variations on the issue). Respondents initially were asked to express their general thoughts about the issue. To gauge their interest in the issue, they were also asked if they had discussed the issue recently in conversations with others or had come across it in their reading or watching the news.

After these general questions about the issue, the respondents were read a specific policy proposal and asked whether they would support or oppose it. Such a question is similar to close-ended questions used in past research to measure people’s preferences toward different issues.

I then obtained the respondent’s interpretation or analysis of the effects of the policy proposal. For example, in the case of Medicare, I inquired about the respondent’s perception of
the likely effect of raising the eligibility age or introducing means testing into the program. Their answers to these questions exposed their beliefs about the implications of policies for different groups in society or society as a whole. Such beliefs reveal the causal script that the respondent uses to trace the impact of a policy. I was interested in the degree to which average citizens share the same understanding and knowledge of a policy’s impact as the experts. It is possible – indeed likely given past research – that respondents see the world rather differently than analysts and that this accounts for the imperfect and often weak correspondence between their preferences and objective interests. However, we know little about people’s alternative perceptions and interpretations of the causal effect of policies, specifically whether they are unaware of the objective impact of a policy or merely unaffected by them and give greater weight to alternative considerations.

The latter portions of the interview were aimed at discovering how respondents conceived of their “self-interest” on the different policy issues discussed. I first asked respondents if they felt the policy in question affected them. Then I asked them to evaluate whether their self-interest was implicated in the policy. This allowed me to explore the respondent’s basis for defining his or her subjective self-interest. Past research has measured objective self-interest according to the tangible benefits that flow from the policy to the respondent or the respondent’s family. I examine whether subjective self-interest is drawn as narrowly, or if it is associated more broadly with how policies affect one’s reference groups or even groups with which one does not identify. I was interested not only in the scope of one’s self-defined interests but also in how that conceptions of self-interest might vary across policy areas. For example, are the elements of one’s perceived self-interest different when discussing health insurance than when considering tax policies?
To measure objective self-interest on the policies, I gathered sufficiently detailed demographic information about the respondents to assess whether they would be personally affected by the policy. I also asked questions about the circumstances of their family members to determine if the policy had an impact on them. For example, I asked respondents whether they or members of their family received Medicare benefits or had health insurance. For immigration policy issues, I inquired about the citizenship and immigration status of the respondent, specifically whether family members (including parents) were born in the U.S. The impact of several policy questions in the interview pertaining to social programs and taxes depends on an individual’s income level. Therefore, I obtained precise measures of income to determine how the respondent would be affected (objectively) by adjustments to the income thresholds used to define eligibility for benefits or susceptibility to income and capital gains taxes.

The series of questions I asked yielded a wealth of qualitative data that I coded and summarized in the matrix contained in Appendix II. For each respondent, I measured demographic information, objective and subjective self-interest on each issue, the causal scripts used to analyze policies, and the respondent’s policy preferences. Therefore, for every respondent and issue, I was able to test – across multiple policy issues -- the correspondence between objective and subjective self-interest, and to examine how policy preferences relate to the respondents’ causal scripts and to their objective and subjective interests (when these are distinct). I was also able to observe how notions of self-interest and the strength of the connection between interests and preferences vary across policy domains. A difficult question that I return to repeatedly is: do the causal stories people tell reflect their motivations for taking the positions they state on the policies? Are their preferences derived from their subjective beliefs about the impact of a policy and the relevance of a policy to their own lives?
E. **Objective Self-Interest**

The objective self-interest model of past studies serves as a baseline for predicting people’s preferences across the set of policy proposals on health care, taxes, and immigration. As noted, there was demographic data on every respondent to identify their objective interest on each policy proposal. Table 1 reports the level of support for each proposal if respondents followed their objective self-interest. For example, those respondents who have household incomes greater than $100,000 a year (50 percent of the sample) should oppose, if their preferences rest on objective interest, a means testing proposal that would reduce Medicare benefits for those earning more than $100,000 a year. In practice, almost two-thirds of all respondents support the means testing proposal, a deviation of 16 percent from the aggregate prediction using objective interests.

Several other issues generate significantly larger discrepancies between predicted and observed aggregate opinion. The two issues that produce the largest deviations in opinion are the proposals to expand Medicaid and to reduce both sales taxes and educational spending. Few respondents in the sample would benefit from greater government spending on Medicaid, yet there is strong majority support for doing so. On the sales tax issue, respondents almost unanimously reject lower sales taxes if it were to reduce educational spending even though less than a quarter of them have school-aged children.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Objective self-interest</th>
<th>Expected support</th>
<th>Support Proposal</th>
<th>Difference in expected/actual support</th>
<th>Support among pro objective group (n)</th>
<th>Support among con objective group (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Means testing Medicare benefits so $100,000 get less</td>
<td>Pro: Income below $100,000 (50%)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>+16.0</td>
<td>68% (25)</td>
<td>64% (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Income above $100,000 (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require all people to have health insurance</td>
<td>Pro: All family insured (84%)</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
<td>83% (42)</td>
<td>75% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Not all family insured (16%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise Medicare eligibility age 65 to 67</td>
<td>Pro: 50 years or older (54%)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>+6.0</td>
<td>63% (27)</td>
<td>57% (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Under 50 (46%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Medicaid program</td>
<td>Pro: Insured, need Medicaid (6%)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>+76.0</td>
<td>66% (3)</td>
<td>83% (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Have insurance, well-off (94%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State college scholarships for illegal immigrants</td>
<td>Pro: Close immigrant (24%)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>+8.0</td>
<td>58% (12)</td>
<td>24% (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Not close immigrant (76%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More national skilled worker visas</td>
<td>Pro: Not high-skilled job (78%)</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
<td>-16.0</td>
<td>67% (39)</td>
<td>45% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: High-skilled job (22%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National path to citizenship for illegal immigrants</td>
<td>Pro: Close immigrant (32%)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
<td>+62.0</td>
<td>100% (16)</td>
<td>91% (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Not close immigrant (38%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local enforcement of immigration laws</td>
<td>Pro: Not close immigrant (66%)</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>-50.0</td>
<td>18% (33)</td>
<td>12% (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Close immigrant (34%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut local sales taxes, school funding</td>
<td>Pro: No school age child (76%)</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>-66.0</td>
<td>13% (38)</td>
<td>0% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Have school age child (24%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise local property taxes</td>
<td>Pro: Not own home (36%)</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>+10.0</td>
<td>61% (18)</td>
<td>37% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: People own home (64%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminate capital gains taxes</td>
<td>Pro: Have investments (62%)</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>-38.0</td>
<td>29% (31)</td>
<td>16% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Con: Do not have investments (38%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise income tax on $100k</td>
<td>Pro: Income below $100,000 (50%)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>-20.0</td>
<td>36% (25)</td>
<td>25% (25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to aggregate opinion on each policy, Table I reports the distribution of opinions of individuals with competing objective interests in the policy. The last two columns of the table show the contrast between groups with opposing interests, which is the typical test of the impact of self-interest on policy preferences. On balance, the influence of objective self-interest is slight, as the group that stands to benefit more from the policy tends to express only slightly greater support for it. For example, support for the Medicare means testing proposal is virtually identical regardless of income level. Sixty-four percent of those making more than $100,000 support the idea compared to 68 percent of those who make less than $100,000. The health insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, sales taxes, income taxes, and capital gains taxes issues all generate differences smaller than 15 percent between groups with opposing objective interests. Local property taxes elicit one of the largest self-interest effects (24 percent), along with two immigration proposals concerning college scholarships and work visas for undocumented immigrants. But two other immigration issues regarding a path to citizenship and local enforcement of immigration laws produce small differences (9 percent and 6 percent respectively) by objective interest. In general, the aggregate preferences of the respondents tends to be more liberal than would be expected on the basis of objective self-interest, and the differences between beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries tends to be smaller than predicted by this model.

F. Subjective Self-Interest

It is impossible to capture every objective difference among individuals that may have a bearing on their policy preferences. Studies of objective self-interest identify one or two distinguishing factors that identify individuals as having a larger stake in the issue. If all of the
objective differences among individuals that might contribute to differences of opinion could be captured using interview measures, the estimated effect of objective self-interest would likely be larger. But in addition to incomplete measurement of objective differences, the results show considerable variation in the subjective beliefs and perceptions of those with similar objective characteristics. People who share objective circumstances offer contrasting analyses of the effects of policies.

Each of the fifty respondents was asked about twelve policy proposals. Treating each response as a separate observation, respondents claimed to have self-interest in about two-thirds (68 percent) of the 600 policy cases (see Table II below). They were most likely to state a personal interest in tax policies and least likely to recognize a self-interest in immigration policies. There is also substantial variation in the propensity of individuals to claim an interest in a policy, as the median number of issues on which self-interest was perceived is eight but the range extends from one to twelve.

Table II. Identifying Subjective Self-Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Identify Subjective Self-Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>72.0% (200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>47.0% (200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>86.0% (200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.3% (600)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
G. Comparing Objective and Subjective Self-Interest

Table III below summarizes the frequency with which people’s subjective self-interest deviated from their objective self-interest. Overall, objective and subjective self-interest differed in 62 percent of the cases when counting failure to perceive one’s interest on an issue as an instance of departure from one’s objective interest. Alternatively, of the 407 policy cases in which respondents were able to identify an interest (see the right column of Table III), subjective self-interest contrasted with objective self-interest 43 percent of the time. The rank ordering of issues by degree of inconsistency shows that immigration issues tended toward the top of the list, and tax issues tended to elicit greater consistency, although the general tendency is for levels of inconsistency to be close to a half on a given proposal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Total percent respondents whose subjective SI differ objective SI total</th>
<th>Percent respondents whose subjective SI differ objective SI if identify subjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Expand Medicaid</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local enforcement of immigration laws</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Path to citizenship</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>State college scholarships for immigrants</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>More high-skilled work visas</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eliminate capital gains taxes</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Means test Medicare benefits</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Raise Medicare eligibility age</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Require all people have insurance</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cut local sales taxes, school funding</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Raise income tax on families over $100,000</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Raise local property taxes</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H. Self-Interest and Policy Preferences

Setting aside variability in the subjective interpretation of self-interest, it is noteworthy that people’s subjective self-interest was more consistent with their policy preference than objective measures of their self-interest (see Table IV). Objective measures of self-interest were consistent with people’s preferences in only about 50 percent of the 600 cases. But again, there is considerable individual variation in the likelihood that objective self-interest is related to policy positions. Only half the respondents took policy positions that were consistent with their objective interests on at least half of the issues (i.e., six or more out of twelve issues).

Table IV: Objective and Subjective Self-Interest and Policy Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Consistency between objective SI and preferences</th>
<th>Consistency between subjective SI and preferences (total)</th>
<th>Consistency between subjective SI and preferences (among those who state subjective SI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>47.5% (200)</td>
<td>69.0% (200)</td>
<td>96.5% (143)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>50.5% (200)</td>
<td>46.0% (200)</td>
<td>97.9% (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>51.0% (200)</td>
<td>81.5% (200)</td>
<td>94.8% (172)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49.7% (600)</td>
<td>65.5% (600)</td>
<td>96.1% (409)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, subjective self-interest was consistent with preferences in nearly two-thirds of the 600 policy cases. Moreover, subjective self-interest was consistent in 96 percent of the 409 policy cases in which people identified a subjective self-interest, with little difference across all three issues. Therefore, whenever people identify a subjective self-interest in a policy, this self-interest is strongly associated with their preference.
The objective self-interest model faltered badly on two issues cited earlier that appeared to have clear beneficiary categories – expanding Medicaid and reducing sales taxes in conjunction with local educational spending (see Table 1 above). A majority (66 percent on the Medicaid issue and 57 percent on the sales tax issue) of those who claimed to have a subjective self-interest construed their interest in a manner that was at odds with their objective self-interest. As noted, when people feel a policy affects their interests, their policy position is almost always consistent with this perceived interest. Therefore, the discrepancy between subjective and objective self-interest on the Medicaid and local sales tax issues (and on the other policy proposals) goes far toward explaining why the objective model does a poor job of predicting preferences.

I. Self-Interest Broadly Construed

The interviews provide evidence of several characteristic ways that subjective self-interest tends to depart from objective self-interest. First, people often view their self-interest according to the impact of policies on a larger group or community. For example, an African-American respondent related his self-interest to the broader black community because “the stronger my community is, the stronger I am, and no man is an island.” This linked-fate conception of self-interest led him to support increased spending on social services such as education that would not directly benefit him because he believed they would help the black community. Likewise, a woman who worked in social services for many years viewed a social safety net to be in her interest because she felt it would help her local community, even if she did not directly use these services. Similarly, a socioeconomically secure woman still viewed a social safety net to be in her self-interest because it improved the entire society. She explained
that: “I do not think as a better-off person you can really enjoy life if you watch people around you suffering.” She believed it was in her self-interest to help others because “I hope if I stand with people today they will stand with me tomorrow.” These interviews illustrate that some people consider their self-interest to be tied to the well being of others, because of their relationships within a larger group or community.

Second, the interviews also highlight how participants’ conceptions of self-interest included both material and non-material benefits. The importance of material factors in subjective self-interest varied across participants. One woman identified her self-interest in manifestly material terms, and she viewed all government policies as having either a positive or negative effect on her taxes and personal finances. Like many more liberal respondents, she believed the interconnected of society impinged on her interests, albeit negatively in her judgment. She claimed, “When there is a natural disaster somewhere else in the country, money is going to come out of my pocket somehow.” She contended even the smallest tax or fee affects her because “if I have to work more to support my lifestyle because more and more of my money gets taken away it affects my mental health, social life, and well-being.” She believed any policy that raised her taxes ran counter to her interest and viewed any tax cut as in her self-interest, even if it affected spending on programs she used.

In contrast, some people incorporated non-material benefits in their conceptions of self-interest. One woman traced her self-interest not to material gain, but to personal freedom. She claimed, “My self-interest is to be able to make my own choices.” The priority she placed on personal freedom influenced her policy preferences, sometimes in unexpected ways that can be understood only in the context of her broader scripts. For example, she opposed government-subsidized health care although her family benefited from it because she wanted to have
complete responsibility and control for their care. She believed it was in her interest to have a choice, even if she received less material benefit. Likewise, another woman identified fairness as part of her self-interest. She grew up poor and had faced discrimination in the workplace, and she saw fairness as essential. As a result, she opposed policies that would benefit her at the expense of others. For example, she opposed capital gains taxes, even though she did not pay them, because she did not think they were fair. She also supported immigration policies that would make it easier for immigrants to compete for her job because in her view it was fair. She stated, “I hope to achieve equality but hope to not do anything at the expense of others.”

Third, the in-depth interviews illustrate that people often evaluate their self-interest using a long rather than short time horizon. For example, one man believed that it is in his own interest to have a smaller government because it would result eventually in greater personal freedom. In explaining his opposition to spending on health care and social services that would benefit him, he asserted, “I will suffer if I can get government to be smaller, and even though it would not help me in the short-term it would help me in the long-term.” He claimed that: “long-term my biggest self-interest is reducing the size and scope of the government.” Likewise, another man viewed his self-interest to extend to hypothetical future states beyond his immediate circumstances. He explained that “if I think it could affect me, or if I could envision the person being affected could be me then I’m interested in it.” He opposed cutting Medicare because it could hurt him in the future, and he opposed discriminatory practices toward immigrants because such practices could in the future be turned against him. A wealthy woman supported paying higher taxes for services she did not currently need because she believed she might need them at some future time. Many parents included their children’s future as part of their self-interest, which led them to view their self-interest in terms of decades and not years. These examples
demonstrate that some people account for how a policy could possibly affect them in the longer-term when evaluating their self-interest.

J. Causal Scripts

Objective self-interest often is less important than people’s subjective beliefs about the effects of a policy. This sections highlights how these beliefs are embedded in causal stories or scripts that people use to explain the effects of a policy. For each policy proposal discussed in the interviews, respondents were asked, “Who would this policy affect and how?” Responses to this question tended to reflect conventional knowledge drawn from personal experience, education, ideology, and exposure to news.

The causal scripts used by respondents comprise beliefs about the effects of policies that are the basis of their policy positions. These scripts fall into two broad categories: Self-regarding scripts describe the policy’s effects on oneself or family or on the social or demographic groups to which one belongs (e.g., homeowners, young families, middle class). Other regarding scripts are of two kinds: they either invoke (1) social groups that one did not belong to (e.g., affluent respondents referring to the poor; citizens speaking about undocumented immigrants; older respondents discussing younger age groups), or they describe (2) the policy’s collective effects on the entire community or society. In addition to identifying a group that will be affected (e.g., immigrants or the wealthy) scripts usually provided an evaluation of that effect (e.g., the wealthy will be hit by the proposed tax increase, which will hurt incentives to work hard; immigrants will have a path to citizenship, which will increase illegal immigration by giving people incentives to break the law.)
Table V below summarizes the proportion of self-regarding scripts and the proportion of outgroup and community scripts across all twelve issues. As is evident in the varied distribution of scripts across issues, certain issues are more likely to elicit self-regarding scripts than other-regarding scripts. On balance, outgroup and community causal scripts were used more often than self and ingroup scripts for every issue except income taxes. But proposals to raise income and property taxes elicited self-regarding scripts from about half of the respondents. By comparison, two-thirds of all respondents employed a causal script focused on an outgroup (undocumented immigrants) in assessing the effects of scholarships for immigrants and local enforcement of immigration laws. Community scripts were most common on policies that enjoyed broad support among the respondents. In discussing proposals to cut school funding and to require health insurance, about two-thirds of all respondents employed a causal script focused on the effects of such policies on the whole society.
### Table V: Variation by Issue in the Type of Causal Script

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Self/Ingroup</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Outgroup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raise income tax on $100k</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise local property taxes</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminate capital gains taxes</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means testing Medicare benefits so $100k get less</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise Medicare eligibility age 65 to 67</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut local sales taxes, school funding</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State college scholarships for illegal immigrants</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require all people to have health insurance</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Medicaid program</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More national skilled worker visas</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National path to citizenship for illegal immigrants</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local enforcement of immigration laws</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### K. Individual Variation in Scripts

Some individuals are more inclined toward self-regarding scripts, but most individuals give weight to both self- and other-regarding factors in evaluating a diverse set of issues. Most respondents used different scripts across the twelve issues (see Table 6 below). About 22 percent of respondents never used self or ingroup scripts. However, 42 percent used self-regarding
scripts for only one or two issues and another 30 percent used self-regarding scripts on between three and five issues. Only 6 percent of respondents used self or ingroup scripts for more than half of the issues. Therefore, a small set of individuals tended to always think about the broader implications of a policy on a community. An even smaller group of individuals most often thought about how a policy would affect them or their social groups. However, about three-fourths of respondents fell between these two groups, thinking about the broader effects of some policies but also seeing some issues as having a predominantly personal impact.

Table VI: Individual Variation in Use of Self-Regarding Scripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Issues focus on self/ingroup</th>
<th>Percent of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

L. Variation in Scripts by Issues and Frames

The scripts people use to discuss a policy reflect not only the objective features of the policy but also how the policy is framed. The interviews show that policy frames affected the likelihood individuals felt the policy primarily affected themselves, groups they did not belong to, or society as a whole. The tax policies discussed clearly identified an income or socioeconomic group that would gain or lose if the policy were enacted. Individuals were asked whether they supported raising income taxes among individuals making more than $100,000. Other proposals involved reducing capital gains tax rates and raising property taxes. Each of these policy questions generated higher frequencies of self-regarding causal scripts as individuals
could readily perceive the relevance of the issue for themselves. By comparison, when asked a pair of policy questions about “immigrants who are not U.S. citizens,” two-thirds of the respondents felt the policies affected people outside of their own social groups.

Previous research has typically tested for the effect of self-interest by comparing the preferences of people who are either inside or outside a beneficiary category. This test assumes that beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries should be equally conscious of their self-interest on an issue. In contrast, I expected self-regarding scripts would be used more frequently by people who are directly affected by a policy than by those who stand to benefit through redistribution of revenues. For example, when asked if they support raising taxes on high income earners making more than $100,000, individuals making more than $100,000 are more likely to give a self-regarding analysis of effects than someone making less than $100,000. I expect individuals outside of the targeted group to be less likely to see they could gain from the revenues generated by imposing higher taxes on others.

This asymmetry between the causal scripts of beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries is likely to be true more generally – it is easier for a property owner to see that higher property taxes will cost them, than for the renter to see how higher property taxes might affect them. Older people who are closer to retirement age will more likely see a change in the eligibility age for Medicare will affect them than are younger people who have years to go before the issue is relevant. These examples of course also illustrate the potential myopia of subjective self-interest as people’s calculations may be dominated by the immediate gain promised by a policy, with little attention to its downstream impact.

The interviews revealed systematic variation in the scripts of individuals in the beneficiary and nonbeneficiary categories. On the issue of raising income tax rates, there were
twenty-eight people with incomes over $100,000. Among those, twenty-one people or 75 percent used self or ingroup scripts. In contrast, twenty-two people had incomes under $100,000 and only eight of them (36 percent) used a self or ingroup script. With respect to property taxes, out of the thirty-two homeowners in the sample, twenty-two of them (69 percent) used self or ingroup scripts. In contrast, eighteen people did not own homes, and only one of them (6 percent) used a self or ingroup script. Across all twelve issues, there were 218 instances (i.e., decisions) in which respondents had the more direct objective stake. Among them, a self or ingroup script was used in seventy-seven instances or 35 percent of the time. In contrast, in the 382 cases in which people had an indirect stake, a self or ingroup script was used only forty-one times (11 percent).

M. Impact of Causal Scripts

Variation in the types of causal scripts applied to different policies suggests why objective self-interest is frequently disconnected from people’s policy preferences. The type of causal script people use is related to the likelihood they perceive self-interest in an issue. In virtually every case (98 percent) in which respondents used a self or ingroup frame, they identified a personal stake in the policy. By comparison, people identified a subjective self-interest in about 79 percent of the cases in which they used a community script and only 38 percent of the cases in which they used an outgroup script.

By affecting perceptions of self-interest, causal scripts also condition the relationship between people’s objective self-interest and subjective self-interest. When respondents used a self or ingroup script, their objective and subjective self-interests differed in only 16 percent of cases. On the other hand, respondents’ objective and subjective self-interests differed in 51
percent of the cases in which they employed a community script and in 56 percent of cases they
used an outgroup script.¹

Finally, the type of causal script affects the likelihood that policy preferences will be
consistent with objective self-interest. If a self or ingroup causal script was used, preferences and
objective self-interest were consistent in about 77 percent of the 118 cases. In contrast,
preferences and objective self-interest were consistent in only about 45 percent of the 266 cases
in which community scripts were used and in 40 percent of the 216 cases with an outgroup
script. When people use a causal script that is focused on outgroups or the whole society, they
will perceive a self-interest only if they can trace the causal effects of the policy back to
themselves indirectly via its effects on outgroups or society.

N. Three Decision Making Models

When taking a position on an issue, variation in the respondent’s causal script and
perception of self-interest influences the weight given to objective self-interest relative to
competing considerations. Based on such variations, the interview data illustrates three broad
types of decision-making models.

Respondents tended to conform to the objective self-interest model when they both used a
self-regarding script and perceived self-interest in the issue. In such cases, objective and
subjective self-interest usually matched, and policy preferences were highly consistent with
objective self-interest. This decision model was reflected in 116 policy decisions, or about 19
percent of the cases. People’s subjective and objective self-interests were consistent in 81 percent
of these cases, and policy preferences were consistent with objective self-interest in 78 percent of

¹ These calculations include only individuals who identified a subjective self-interest on the issue.
² I also test whether the impact of subjective self-interest on policy preferences is mediated by ideological variables.
the cases. This model was most frequently observed on tax issues and least commonly on immigration issues. For example, 58 percent of respondents mentioned an income tax increase would affect them personally (either positively or negatively); among these cases, objective self-interest was consistent with subjective self-interest 83 percent of the time, and objective self-interest was consistent with policy preferences also 83 percent of the time.

The frequency with which this model characterized decisions varied across respondents, as some never conformed to it and others adhered to it a majority of the time. One respondent followed the objective model in eight of twelve cases. Her subjective self-interest and objective self-interest never differed as she viewed policies in a material and individualistic manner. As a result, she supported any policy that would lower her taxes and opposed any policy that would raise her taxes.

Alternatively, some decisions were consistent with a *symbolic politics model*. There were 188 instances (31 percent of all choices made) where people used an outgroup or community script and did not identify a subjective self-interest. This pattern was observed most frequently on immigration issues and least frequently on tax issues. In 43 percent of these cases, policy preferences were nevertheless consistent with the objective self-interest model, but in the remainder of cases, objective self-interest and preferences differed. An example is a man who based his preference on the four immigration issues on his beliefs about fairness and not on any perceived impact on his own life. Likewise, an affluent woman in good health claimed the health care policies would not affect her personally but supported them because she believed all people were entitled to health care. As these examples indicate, preferences appeared to be motivated by ideological or partisan values.
When people construed an issue symbolically, their preferences depended on whether the values furthered by the policy were consistent with their own values. In such cases it is probably inaccurate to describe individuals as facing a conflict between pursuing either their interests or their political values, because they do not appear to have their objective interests in mind when evaluating the policy. These instances are perhaps closest to the kinds of reflexive choices described by the symbolic politics model in which people express support or opposition to values and concepts such as education or immigration without calculating personal costs and benefits.

The objective and symbolic models described only about half of the policy decisions made by respondents. In the remaining decisions, subjective self-interest was the driving factor: individuals said the policy would mainly affect outgroups or the community as a whole, but then connected these effects to their own self-interest. Objective and subjective self-interest differed in 53 percent of these cases, and preferences were consistent with objective self-interest only 57 percent of the time. However, policy preferences were consistent with subjective self-interest 96 percent of the time.

Many individuals feel, not surprisingly, they have a stake in policies that are not targeted toward their own group. They may feel, for example, they stand to benefit from a society that looks after the health care needs of its citizens or that provides opportunities for undocumented immigrants to become citizens. In some cases, the respondents’ more broadly construed subjective self-interest remains consistent with their objective self-interest, but more commonly subjective and objective self-interest part company in these instances.

Decisions conforming to the subjective self-interest model occurred most frequently on the issues of school spending (80 percent of cases) and expanding Medicaid (68 percent of cases) and least frequently for immigrant scholarships (28 percent of cases) and income taxes (30
percent of cases). Respondents therefore were more likely to equate collective interest and self-interest on popular programs that were believed to strengthen the institutions of society. For example, many individuals without children nonetheless said it was in their personal interest to have a strong education system.

As with the other decision-making models, the subjective self-interest model was followed with varying frequency among the interview subjects. One man viewed the effects of virtually every policy from the perspective of the whole society, and felt that he also benefited when society was improved. This made it in his self-interest to support policies that furthered public safety, strong schools, a productive workforce, and a healthy population, and in general to adopt preferences according to whether he believed a policy helped or hurt his community.

People who identified and pursued their subjective self-interest sometimes explicitly overrode a narrow objective interest in the policy, thereby indicating they were accounting for a wider array of considerations in their calculations. These cases should not be lumped into the symbolic politics model. While their policy preferences did not follow their objective interests, they appeared to be engaged in psychologically rational decision making. They were judging the policy based on their beliefs about the effects of the policy and the values they assigned to those outcomes. For example, one respondent reasoned that expanding Medicaid would help the poor but lead to higher taxes. He recognized lower taxes were in his interest but supported the policy overall because he believed he personally benefited from living in a healthier society. Another respondent believed work visas could hurt her engineer husband but she supported it because she believed in the value of equal opportunity. In each case, the respondent was aware of the objective effects of the policy but chose to focus on its social ramifications and the interest he or
she had in the collective benefits of the policy. The decision was carefully considered rather than reflexive.

O. Results Summary

The symbolic politics model described about twice as many decisions as the objective self-interest model. However, about half the decisions conformed to a subjective self-interest model that has not been featured in prior studies. The findings from the interviews also highlight that people employ different kinds of considerations depending on the substance and framing of issues, and that there are individual differences in the emphasis given to symbolic or self-interested considerations.

People often, but do not always, believe they have a personal interest in a policy, and there is considerable individual variation in how people conceive of their self-interest. Many of the respondents viewed their self-interest in broad terms by connecting their self-interest to the interest of a larger group or society as a whole. Participants also often defined their self-interest in both material and non-material terms. Lastly, many participants viewed their self-interest from both short-term and long-term perspectives. As a result, participants’ subjective self-interest often differed from their individual short-term, material interest when they explained their attitudes toward health care, taxes, and immigration policies. However conceived, people’s subjective self-interest usually predicted their policy preferences, and prevailed over objective self-interest when objective and subjective interests conflicted.
P. **Addressing Critiques of Subjective Self-Interest**

Scholars have challenged the use of subjective self-interest for a number of reasons. The most common critique is that subjective self-interest is a post hoc justification or rationalization. In this sense, subjective self-interest might simply be a proxy for one’s attitudes rather than an explanation for them. However, the in-depth interviews illustrate that people do not always conceive of having a personal interest in every issue, and people do not appear compelled to justify preferences in terms of self-interest. Moreover, people’s subjective self-interest is not random or unpredictable, but often related to the substance of the policy and its salience in their lives.

It would be problematic if individuals claimed their policy positions furthered their self-interest in every instance. In practice, respondents did not believe their self-interest was relevant in almost a third of the 600 policy cases. Perceptions of self-interest varied by policy domain. Only about half of the respondents believed they had an interest in immigration policies while they identified a personal interest in about 72 percent of health care policies and 86 percent of tax policies. Further variation arose across proposals within each policy area (see Table VII below). For example, about a fourth of the respondents did not identify a self-interest in eliminating capital gains taxes while only 2 percent did not recognize self-interest in a sales tax cut that would reduce spending for schools.

Differences were also apparent across individuals within the same policy domain. For example, one woman in her 30s said she had a personal interest in Medicare because it would affect how she cared for her parents. At the same time, she said she did not see immigration policies as having any affect on her life. In contrast, another woman in her 30s did not believe she had any self-interest in Medicare because she believed it would not exist when she was a
senior citizen; however, she felt she had a personal interest in immigration policies because immigrants helped the economy and kept the costs of goods and services low for her.

Table VII: Percent of Respondents Who Identify Subjective Self-Interest in Each Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percent identify subjective self-interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cut local sales taxes, school funding</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Raise income tax on families making over $100,000</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Raise local property taxes</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eliminate capital gains taxes</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Expand Medicaid</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Means test Medicare benefits</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Require all people have insurance</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Raise Medicare eligibility age</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Local enforcement of immigration laws</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Path to citizenship</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>State college scholarships for immigrants</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>More high-skilled work visas</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results show that people indeed are more likely to perceive self-interest on issues that have a more direct, tangible impact on their physical or material wellbeing, such as health care or tax reforms. However the relative ease with which one can identify a stake on an issue does not necessarily mean the perceived effect of the policy corresponds narrowly with one’s objective self-interest. Ninety eight percent of respondents reported having a stake on the local sales tax issue, and 88 percent felt they had an interest in the proposal to raise taxes on high-income earners. But on neither of these issues was their high consistency between objective interests and policy preferences.

It does not appear that people feel the need to justify their preferences in terms of their self-interest. Several participants explained that for certain policies their preferences were based more on an ideology or value. For example, one woman said her views on taxes were based on
her belief in equality, not self-interest, while a wealthier man said his beliefs about the need for universal health care were due to egalitarian values rather than self-interest. The interviews also show people may be more likely to rationalize preferences based on perceived self-interest in terms of a broader value or ideal for the society. When asked about how self-interest influenced their preferences, several participants said it would be selfish or wrong to base their preferences on their individual needs or interests. Instead, they said policies should be based on a broader notion of what was best for society overall.

The interviews also demonstrate that subjective self-interest is integrated into the causal scripts that people use to understand the consequences of public policies. These scripts are not based only on objective facts, but a combination of personal experience, knowledge, ideology, and conventional wisdom. They affect how people view politicians, government, and policies, and shape people’s conceptions of their self-interest on specific issues. Some participants used the same causal script across multiple policies; as a result, people’s perceived interest in one policy could be related to their subjective self-interest in another issue because they use the same script across policies. For example, the woman who believed all government policies involved waste felt that less government involvement in both health care and immigration was in her self-interest because more government support would lead to higher taxes on her. In order to understand how people view their self-interest, researchers need to understand how people understand the operations of government and view the motivations of politicians and ordinary citizens. The interviews illustrate that people use an assortment of causal scripts and, as a result, they conceive of their self-interest in a wide variety of ways. However, within this diversity there are common themes in how people interpret the consequences of policies for themselves.
Q. **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter took a new tack on the inquiry into the effect of self-interest on public opinion by examining the psychological rationality of individuals. It used in-depth interviews to explore how citizens understand and explain the impact of policies that have varying objective implications for them. The interviews provide evidence on how people interpret their own interests in analyzing the consequences of policies and whether their beliefs, attitudes, and preferences are coherent (Chong 2014).

In studying people’s subjective interests, it is important to understand people’s perceptions of the implications or causal impact of a policy, because one can accurately perceive the state of the world but draw different implications of that state (Gaines et al. 2007).

Erroneous or contested beliefs about the effects of a policy are commonplace in politics and tend to reduce the influence of objective self-interest on preferences. Limited information and misinformation in politics are obstacles to substantive rationality because they prevent people from making optimal decisions. An individual has to be accurately informed about who benefits from the policy in order to pursue his or her objective self-interest. In practice, people often cannot determine how policies affect them, and they receive conflicting claims about policy consequences from political elites. Partisan and ideological values in these circumstances can influence how people perceive their interests. For example, the idea that less government is better for society may influence one’s beliefs about a health insurance proposal even though the policy provides benefits to oneself. When ideological and partisan assumptions are integrated into people’s beliefs systems, the effects of ideology and party are not independent of the effects of subjective self-interest.
The research explored the idea of a “script” that people use when describing their interpretation of the consequences of a policy. People tell stories about politics that explain the behavior of individuals, the efficiency of political institutions, and the consequences of policies. These scripts combine data (experiences and information) with intuitions about human behavior and the plausibility of certain explanations of events. A script provides an account of how a policy will (or will not) affect oneself and others in society. If subjective self-interest is relevant, the respondent’s causal script should tie a policy to his or her goals.

The in-depth interview findings highlight the following:

• People in similar circumstances offer contrasting interpretations of their self-interest because they employ different causal scripts about the consequences of policies.

• Individuals who belong to groups targeted or highlighted by a policy (e.g., a tax aimed at high income individuals) are more likely to perceive an interest in the policy than are individuals outside the targeted group who receive corollary or indirect benefits from the policy.

• Heterogeneity of beliefs within both beneficiary and nonbeneficiary groups about the consequences of a policy dilutes the impact of objective self-interest because people with the same objective interest have different subjective interests that push them in contrary directions.

• People do not necessarily have accurate assumptions about what policies they will depend on in the future, but their beliefs about their future needs and states (e.g., whether they expect to be ill or unemployed) affect their calculations of the benefits of a policy.

• People’s definitions of their subjective self-interest vary widely. People include conceptions of good public policy, fairness and equality, and aggregate economic effects, among other factors in their evaluations of self-interest. They generalize from what is good for their group to what is good for them. The narrow definition of self-interest – focused on material or
tangible benefits, received in the short to medium term by oneself and one’s family – is far more restrictive than how people define their interests subjectively. When people support policies that they believe to be in their subjective interest, they are only sometimes referring to tangible benefits that flow to themselves; often they refer to other-regarding benefits from which they claim to derive utility.

- Individuals almost always pursue their subjective self-interest when they acknowledge having an interest, but they often do not perceive having a stake in a policy. Therefore, subjective self-interest does not turn out to be tautological (i.e., explaining every action) because people’s policy preferences are not always supported by a subjective self-interest claim. People do not invariably say: I support x because x is better for me personally.

Many questions remain to be explored, and the following three stem directly from the findings here.

- More research is needed to develop methods to better measure subjective self-interest, especially on closed-ended surveys. In particular, what is the most reliable and valid way to determine if people feel they have a stake in a policy and to elicit their understanding of the effects of a policy?

- There has been little exploration of the characteristics of individuals that make them more inclined to identify and follow their objective self-interest in a policy. Subsequent analysis should examine more systematically the individual variation the interviews detected in people’s tendencies to connect their objective and subjective self-interest.

- Finally, an important issue to pursue is whether correcting or changing beliefs about policies changes policy preferences. Do people update their beliefs when provided with information that challenges the assumptions in their causal scripts? Such research, ideally
employing an experimental design, would address whether errors of belief can be corrected, or if the causal scripts that people hold resist change (in the manner of symbolic attitudes). This research would also speak to the extent to which people’s explanations for their policy positions are rationalizations for preferences formed for alternative reasons.
III. THE EFFECTS SELF-INTEREST ON PREFERENCES

A. Background

A number of influential studies have shown that value-driven predispositions such as partisanship or ideology, and not self-interest, are the main influences on preferences (Sears et al. 1980; Citrin et al. 1997; Lau and Heldman 2009). Such studies have compared the direct effects of these predispositions and self-interest on policy preferences. However, this research has several limitations that may lead to the underestimation of self-interest on people’s preferences. In particular, past studies have often used incomplete measures of self-interest and have not examined how self-interest interacts with other factors to influence people’s attitudes.

I report the results of three studies that explore the direct and indirect effects of self-interest on policy preferences. This research varies from past research on self-interest in several important ways. First, I examine the influence of both objective and subjective interest on policy preferences. Objective self-interest is based on characteristics or circumstances that may lead people to benefit from or be harmed by a policy (e.g. having a child enrolled in public school seems likely to be associated with self-interest in school funding policies). Subjective self-interest is measured by asking people their perceptions of how a policy will affect them personally. Second, I explored whether objective self-interest may have indirect effects on policy preferences by moderating the effect of more abstract variables (e.g. political ideology) on policy preferences. Finally, I explore whether subjective self-interest mediates the effects of more ideological variables.  

2 I also test whether the impact of subjective self-interest on policy preferences is mediated by ideological variables.
In Study 1, using data from a 2008 telephone survey conducted with City of Chicago residents I examine how objective and subjective self-interest impact preferences toward five policy issues: the Iraq War, school funding, gentrification, affirmative action and immigration. In the second study, I use data from a 2010 survey in suburban Chicago to explore the effects of both objective and subjective self-interest on six immigration-related policy preferences. In Study 3, I analyze data from 18 telephone surveys conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2011 and 2012 to test how subjective and objective self-interest impact people’s views toward the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

B. Previous Studies

Much research on self-interest has compared the effects of self-interest and stable predispositions such as political ideology, which are often referred to as symbolic politics variables. Sears and Funk (1990) identify three predominant symbolic politics variables: political ideology, political partisanship, and racial tolerance. Since the late 1970s, a number of studies using survey data have concluded that these three symbolic predispositions dominate self-interest in shaping attitudes toward issues such as the Vietnam War (Lau et al. 1978), school busing (Sears et al. 1980), health care (Sears et al. 1980; Lau and Heldman 2009), taxes (Sears and Citrin 1982), and immigration (Citrin et al. 1997). In a review of the self-interest studies literature, Sears and Funk (1990) concluded, “Self-interest ordinarily does not have much effect on the mass public’s political attitudes” (p. 170).
These past studies have several limitations that may have led them to underestimate the influence of self-interest on political attitudes. First, the measures of objective self-interest used in some past studies seem problematic. Second, although subjective self-interest can have a significant impact on preferences toward issues such as economic development (Chong 2000) and local taxes (Tedin et al. 2001), most previous studies have not examined subjective self-interest. Lastly, most past research has examined only the main effect of objective self-interest and has not considered that self-interest may affect policy preferences by moderating the effects of other variables on preferences, although recent research suggests this is possible (Henderson and Hillygus 2011; Margalit 2013).

C. Hypotheses

1. Symbolic Politics Variables

Past studies show that ideology, partisanship, and racial tolerance can have significant direct effects on policy preferences. In particular, research illustrates that ideology and partisanship have a strong impact on attitudes toward issues such as health care, taxes, and government spending (Sears et. al. 1980; Sears and Citrin 1982; Lau and Heldman 2009). In addition, racial tolerance impacts preferences toward race-related issues such as school busing or immigration, such that people higher in racial tolerance are more supportive of policies that benefit minorities (Sears et al. 1979; Citrin et. al. 1997). This research leads to the first set of hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1: Symbolic predispositions will be influenced by policy preferences and attitudes.*
1a: Attitudes and policy preferences toward policies relevant to a particular race or ethnic group will be influenced by racial tolerance toward the relevant group (e.g. tolerance toward Latinos for immigration and tolerance towards Blacks for issues like busing or affirmative action).

1b: Policy preference and attitudes not related to the interests of a particular race or ethnic group will be influenced by partisanship and ideology.

2. **Objective Self-Interest**

One difficulty with many studies that have dismissed the influence of self-interest on preferences is that the measures of objective self-interest used lack face validity. For example, Citrin et al. use evaluations of personal economic situation as one measure of self-interest toward whether the country should allow more or less immigrants (Citrin et al. 1997). However, personal economic situation seems to be a weak measure of self-interest in immigration policies because increased immigration could have positive effects (e.g. cheaper goods/services) or negative effects (e.g. fewer jobs/lower wages) on people’s economic situation. Furthermore, both people with positive and negative evaluations of their economic situation could believe that they will be negatively (or positively) affected by immigration.

In other studies, the objective self-interest indicator may be valid but it likely identifies only a small subset of individuals whose interests are affected by an issue. For example, Sears et al. (1980) measure self-interest toward crime as whether people have recently been victimized, based on the assumption that people who were victimized would favor more crime prevention, and people not recently victimized would oppose crime prevention policies. However, people not victimized by a crime may have an interest in supporting crime prevention for other reasons.
(because they fear being a victim or because they or a family member were a victim in the past). As a result, the impact of self-interest on crime prevention is likely underestimated as a significant number of members of the control group may also have a personal interest in more crime prevention. Any single measure of objective self-interest is likely to be simplistic and minimize the effects of self-interest, as almost any issue can affect one’s interest in multiple ways.

In contrast to this past work, previous studies that use very clear objective self-interest measures have found that self-interest influences preferences. For example, smokers oppose higher taxes on cigarettes (Dixon et al. 1989; Green and Gerken 1989), gun owners oppose gun restrictions (Wolpert and Gimpel 1998), and parents oppose laws holding parents responsible for underage drinking (Crowe and Bailey 1995). Therefore, I hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2a:** People who would directly benefit from a policy will be more supportive than people who will not directly benefit from the issue/policy. Conversely, people who would directly be harmed by a policy will be less supportive of the policy than people who will not directly be harmed by the policy.

3. **Subjective Self-Interest**

Many past studies also rely only on simple measures of objective self-interest and do not consider subjective perceptions of self-interest. For example, Lau et al. (1978) assume that having a close relative serving in Vietnam will lead to greater support for the Vietnam War. However, measures of objective self-interest may not always correspond to people’s subjective self-interest. People with a relative serving in the war could oppose the war because they want the war to end and the relative to return home. As a result, whether people have a relative in the
war may be only weakly associated with subjective beliefs about self-interest. People may also believe that an issue will affect them even if it does not directly affect them or their family or friends if they perceive that it will affect the community in which they live. For example, people may support increased taxes to support local schools even if they are not directly benefited by these taxes. Past research also shows measures of subjective self-interest can have a significant impact on people’s preferences toward issues such as economic development (Chong 2000) and local taxes (Tedin et al. 2001). Therefore, I also hypothesize that subjective self-interest will have direct effects on policy preferences.

**Hypothesis 2b:** People who perceive they will benefit from a policy will be more supportive of the policy than people who perceive they will not benefit from the issue/policy. Conversely, people who perceive they will be harmed by a policy will be less supportive of the policy than people who perceive they will not be harmed by the policy.

Although distinct from objective self-interest, perceived or subjective self-interest is likely affected by objective self-interest. People’s perceptions of how different issues will affect them are likely related to their personal circumstances and measures of objective self-interest. Differences in race, family situations, and socioeconomic status could affect how people understand their self-interest in different issues. For example, race likely affects how people perceive affirmative action policies will impact them, and health status could impact how they perceive the effects of a health care law. As a result, measures of objective self-interest such as race or insurance status could impact attitudes via people’s perceptions of how a policy will affect them.

**Hypothesis 3:** Subjective self-interest will mediate the effects of objective self-interest on preferences, such that variables such as race or insurance status will at least partly influence
people’s policy preferences and attitudes indirectly, by affecting their perception of how policies will hurt/help them.

Subjective and objective self-interest may not be strongly associated with one another in part because subjective perceptions of self-interest may be influenced by factors other than objective self-interest. In particular, subjective perceptions of self-interest are likely not completely independent from symbolic predispositions such as ideology, partisanship, and racial tolerance. The theory of motivated reasoning suggests that variables such as ideology and partisanship influence the evaluation of policies/issues (Lodge and Hamill 1986; Taber 2003; Lodge and Taber 2005). Moreover, research shows that political partisanship shapes political perceptions, economic beliefs and spending habits (Bartels 2002; Evans and Anderson 2006; Gerber and Huber 2009; Parker-Stephen 2013). I argue that symbolic predispositions are likely to affect how people perceive policies will hurt or help them, which in turn will influence their political attitudes. Therefore, I hypothesize that in addition to directly affecting policy preferences and attitudes, symbolic predispositions also influence policy preference indirectly, via subjective self-interest.

Hypothesis 4: Subjective self-interest will partly mediate the effects of symbolic predispositions on preferences, such that variables such as ideology, partisanship, and racial tolerance will influence people’s policy preferences and attitudes indirectly, by affecting their perception of how policies will hurt/help them.

4. Indirect Effects of Objective Self-Interest

Past public opinion research has primarily focused on comparing the direct effects of objective self-interest with the direct effects of symbolic politics variables such as partisanship,
ideology, and racial tolerance. These studies have not explored the possibility that objective self-interest may influence policy preferences and attitudes indirectly. However, some recent studies show self-interest may moderate the impact of symbolic predispositions such as partisanship on preferences. For example, concerns about health care influenced the opinions of Republicans (but not Democrats) toward the ACA. Strong Republicans worried about their health care were less likely to change their opinions to oppose health care reform in response to elite debate over the ACA than were strong Republicans not worried about their health care (Henderson and Hillygus 2011). Likewise, Republicans who lost a job during the recession became significantly more supportive of social welfare policies over time than did Republicans with a job, and this association was not seen among Democrats (Margalit 2013), although similar patterns were not observed for two other indicators of change in economic circumstances (experiencing a decrease in income and having a less secure job). These findings provide evidence that objective self-interest may sometimes moderate the effect of partisanship on policy preferences.

Specifically, both findings suggest that symbolic politics may matter more for respondents who are not directly affected by an issue (i.e. those low in self-interest). This may occur because self-interest reduces the need to rely on symbolic factors as attitude cues and weaken the effects of these variables on attitudes. Among individuals whose self-interest is affected by an issue, that self-interest may primarily drive their policy preferences and attitudes, while symbolic factors may only weakly influence policy attitudes. In contrast, the policy preferences of individuals whose self-interest is not affected by an issue may be more likely to rely on symbolic predispositions. In particular, many studies show that political partisanship and ideology often serve as heuristics people use when forming preferences or voting (Graber 1984; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Popkin 1991). If people use partisanship and/or ideology as heuristics,
they seem more likely to rely on these factors when forming preferences about policies when they do not have a clear self-interest than policies when they have a clear self-interest. This leads to one hypothesis about how objective self-interest might moderate the effect of symbolic politics variables:

*Hypothesis 5a: Objective self-interest will moderate the effects of symbolic factors on preferences, such that symbolic politics will have greater influence among individuals who are not directly affected by an issue.*

One could also imagine, however, that self-interest could also increase the influence of symbolic politics variables. Evidence from social psychology suggests that self-interest increases the importance of an attitude (Boninger et al. 1995; Visser et al. 2006) and its accessibility (Zaller 1992; Lavine et al. 1996; Lavine et al. 2000). Self-interest is also associated with the extent to which people think carefully about information about the issue (Holbrook et al. 2005). Thus, when people’s self-interest is engaged, their policy preferences may be formed through more thoughtful, elaborative processes. This could increase the association between symbolic politics and policy preferences if this elaboration leads respondents to see symbolic politics as more relevant to the issue. This line of thinking leads to a second possibility:

*Hypothesis 5b: Objective self-interest will moderate the effects of symbolic factors on preferences, such that symbolic politics will have greater influence among individuals who are directly affected by an issue.*

Of course, it is possible that both hypotheses are true. One possible consequence is that these countervailing effects will cancel each other out, leading to the appearance of no moderation by objective self-interest. Another possibility is that each hypothesis may be true under different conditions. For example, there is substantial evidence that individuals use partisanship and
ideology as heuristics when evaluating policies or developing opinions about issues (Graber 1984; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Popkin 1991). This suggests that these variables may be particularly influential under conditions of low self-interest (consistent with hypothesis 5a). However, there is much less evidence that racial tolerance is a heuristic. One definition of racial tolerance is that it “involves a conscious rejection of prejudiced attitudes, beliefs and responses. That is, one’s own negative stereotypes are recognized, judged against experiential knowledge or value systems, and rejected” (Robinson et al. 2001, p. 74; also see Witenberg, 2002). This definition suggests that the effects of racial tolerance may be the result of more thoughtful processes and not a heuristic. In particular, the links between racial tolerance and attitudes about specific policies might be enhanced by the greater elaboration likely to result from having one’s self-interest engaged (consistent with Hypothesis 5b).

D. Effects Study 1

The first study features an analysis of how objective and subjective self-interest and symbolic politics influence policy preferences.

1. Respondents and Procedures

Data for Study 1 come from the 2008 Chicago Area Study (CAS). The University of Illinois Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) conducted this survey in collaboration with students enrolled in the 2008 CAS. The interviews were conducted by both students and by professional interviewers. An RDD telephone survey of Chicago adults at least 18 years old was conducted between April 19 and August 16, 2008. In households with more than one eligible adult, the Troldahl-Carter-Bryant selection method (Bryant 1975) was used to randomly select a
respondent. The data was weighted to adjust for probability of selection based on the number of adults in household. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and averaged 24 minutes. There were 672 completed interviews, and the AAPOR Response Rate 3 for the survey was 20.3 percent. The UIC Institutional Review Board approved all research procedures.

2. Measures

Question wordings and coding for all variables in Effects Study 1 are available in Appendix IV. All independent variables were coded from 0 to 1.

Policy preferences

Respondents were asked their policy preferences for five issues (removing troops from Iraq, increasing school funding, gentrification, affirmative action, and pro-immigration policies). For each issue, higher values indicated more support.

Subjective Self-Interest

Perceived self-interest was measured for each issue by asking: “How much does this issue affect the way you live your life? Would you say a great deal, quite a bit, some, a little bit, or not at all?” Variables were coded so higher values indicated more effect.

Objective Self-Interest

Measures of objective self-interest with reasonable face validity were available for school funding (having a public school child), gentrification (owning a home), affirmative action (identifying as Black) and immigration (identifying as Latino). No measure was available for the Iraq War.
Symbolic Politics Predispositions

Political ideology (higher values indicated more liberal ideology) and political partisanship (higher values indicated more Democrat) were measured in this survey, but racial tolerance was not.

Control Variables

Political interest, political knowledge, news consumption, income, education, age, and gender were measured.

3. Analysis

I first used logistic and ordered logistic regression to regress policy preferences on objective self-interest, ideology, partisanship, and the control variables. Next, I added subjective self-interest to these models to explore its effects, and tested whether subjective self-interest mediated objective self-interest, ideology and partisanship (using the Sobel-Goodman Mediation test).³

For each issue where objective self-interest was measured, I estimated one model that included an interaction term between ideology and the measure of objective self-interest, and a second model that included an interaction term between partisanship and the measure of objective self-interest. I then estimated separate regressions for respondents with and without an objective self-interest for each issue to assess the shape of any interactions. Unless otherwise specified, all models included political interest, political knowledge, news consumption, income, education, age and gender as control variables.

³ The UCLA Statistical Consulting Group developed the Sobel-Goodman mediation tests for STATA used in this chapter are based on the Preacher and Hayes bootstrapped mediation test (UCLA 2014).
4. **Results**

*Main Effects of Symbolic Politics Variables*

Political ideology and partisanship had theoretically sensible significant effects on policy preferences for some of the issues (see Table VIII). People who identified as more liberal were more likely to support removing troops from Iraq (coefficient=1.05, p<.05), affirmative action policies (coefficient 2.28, p<.01) and more open immigration policies (coefficient=1.19, p<.05) than people who identified as conservatives. Ideology did not predict attitudes toward school funding and gentrification, which is perhaps not surprising given that gentrification and school funding are primarily local issues that are not strongly linked to ideology.

Democrats were more likely than Republicans to support removing troops from Iraq (coefficient=1.53, p<.01), increasing school funding (coefficient=1.86, p<.01), and continuing affirmative action (coefficient=1.92, p<.01). Partisanship did not significantly predict preferences toward gentrification and immigration.

*Main Effects of Self-Interest*

Objective self-interest had a significant and large influence on all four issues tested (see Table VIII). Respondents who reported they had children in public schools were more likely to support increased school funding than those who did not (coefficient=.72, p<.05). Respondents who owned their own homes were more likely to think gentrification is a good thing than those who did not (coefficient=1.18, p<.01). Black respondents were more likely to support affirmative action policies than non-Black respondents (coefficient=2.40, p<.01). Finally, Latino respondents were more likely to support less restrictive immigration policies than were non-Latino respondents (coefficient=1.89, p<.01).
When added to the model, subjective self-interest was associated with preferences toward school funding, gentrification and immigration (see Table VIII). The more people believed school funding affected their lives, the more supportive they were of increased funding (coefficient=.62, p<.10). The more respondents believed gentrification affected their lives, the more likely they were to think gentrification was a bad thing (coefficient=-.84, p<.05). Likewise, the more people believed immigration affected their lives, the more likely they were to support more restrictive immigration policies (coefficient=-.63, p<.10). Subjective self-interest did not have significant effects on Iraq War or affirmative action policy preferences.
Table VIII: Logistic/Ordered Logistic Coefficients for Effects Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>School funding</th>
<th>Gentrification</th>
<th>Affirmative Action</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Main</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolic Variables</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>1.05*</td>
<td>1.08*</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.52)</td>
<td>(.52)</td>
<td>(.57)</td>
<td>(.56)</td>
<td>(.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>1.53**</td>
<td>1.52**</td>
<td>1.86**</td>
<td>1.88**</td>
<td>-.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.46)</td>
<td>(.46)</td>
<td>(.50)</td>
<td>(.49)</td>
<td>(.50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Interest Variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subjective SI</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>.62+</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.84*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.35)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.34)</td>
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<td>(.35)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public School Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>446</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are for ordered logistic regressions for Iraq and immigration models and logistic regressions for school funding, gentrification and affirmative action models. **p<.01   *p<.05   +p<.10
Subjective Self-interest as a Mediator

There was limited evidence that subjective self-interest mediated the effects of objective self-interest on preferences. Objective self-interest indirectly impacted policy preferences via subjective self-interest only for immigration (coefficient=-.02, p<.05). Being Latino impacted how people believe immigration policies will affect them, and these beliefs influence their preferences.\footnote{There was no evidence that subjective self-interest mediated the effects of partisanship or ideology on preferences.}

Objective Self-interest as a Moderator

Objective self-interest moderated the effects of ideology on policy preferences only for affirmative interaction (see Table IX below).
Table IX Logistic/Ordered Logistic Coefficients with Interaction Terms for Effects Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>School funding</th>
<th>Gentrification</th>
<th>Affirmative Action</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Interaction Obj</td>
<td>No Obj</td>
<td>Interaction Obj</td>
<td>No Obj</td>
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<td>(.59)</td>
<td>(1.33)</td>
<td>(1.61)</td>
<td>(.78)</td>
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<td>1.72**</td>
<td>-.85+</td>
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<td>(.50)</td>
<td>(1.50)</td>
<td>(1.54)</td>
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<td><strong>Self-Interest Variables</strong></td>
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<td>Public School Child</td>
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<td>(.73)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own Home</td>
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<td>(.82)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5.01**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.83)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>2.66*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.21)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction Variables</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective*Ideology</td>
<td>-.61</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.33)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.31)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.38)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coefficients are for ordered logistic regressions for the immigration models. Coefficients are for logistic regressions for school funding, gentrification and affirmative action models. **p<.01  *p<.05  +p<.10.
The models all control for income, education, age, gender, political interest, news consumption and political knowledge.
For each issue, the first column is the interaction model, the second column is the model for respondents with an objective self-interest, and the third column is the model for respondents without an objective self-interest.
The interaction between being black and ideology significantly predicted attitudes toward affirmative action (coefficient=-5.02, p<.01). Among Black respondents, ideology did not significantly predict affirmative action policy positions (coefficient=-2.05, ns). However, among non-Black respondents, ideology significantly predicted policy preferences such that liberals supported affirmative action more than conservatives (coefficient=3.81, p<.01).

For the other three issues where measures of objective self-interest were available (school funding, gentrification and immigration), interaction terms between objective self-interest and ideology were not significant, although these interactions were in a consistent direction (see Table IX). For school funding, ideology did not have a significant effect for respondents with public school children (coefficient=-.33, ns), but it did have a significant impact on preferences among people without public school children (coefficient=1.01, p<.10), such that liberals were more supportive of school funding than conservatives. Being more liberal had a positive effect on homeowners’ attitudes toward gentrification (coefficient=.79, ns) and a negative effect on the attitudes of non-homeowners (coefficient=-.62, ns). Lastly, ideology did not have a significant effect on immigration policy preferences among Latinos (coefficient=-2.75, ns), but it did have a significant impact on the preferences of non-Latinos (coefficient=1.41, p<.05), such that liberals were more positive toward immigration than were conservatives. None of the interactions between objective self-interest and partisanship were significant.

The findings provide weak evidence that the effects of ideology on preferences depend on people’s objective self-interest. Consistent with Hypothesis 5a, ideology had a stronger effect on policy preferences among individuals who were not directly affected by a policy than among individuals who were directly affected. There was no evidence, however, that objective self-interest moderated the effects of partisanship on policy preferences and attitudes.
5. **Discussion**

*Summary of Results*

The first study highlights how symbolic predispositions, objective self-interest and subjective self-interest have direct and indirect effects on preferences toward a variety of policies. The results provide partial support for four of the hypotheses. Ideology and/or partisanship had significant direct effects on attitudes toward the Iraq War, school funding, affirmative action and immigration (*Hypothesis 1b*). Measures of objective self-interest had significant effects on preferences toward school funding, gentrification, affirmative action, and immigration (*Hypothesis 2a*). Likewise, subjective self-interest significantly influenced preferences toward school funding, gentrification and immigration (*Hypothesis 2b*). There was much more limited evidence that subjective self-interest could mediate the effects of objective self-interest on policy preferences and attitudes (*Hypothesis 3*) and that objective self-interest moderated the effects of ideology (*Hypothesis 5a*).

*Limitations*

This study faced a number of limitations. First, the survey included only about 500 respondents, and several self-interest subgroups include less than 100 people. These small sample sizes reduced power, and decreased the chances of finding significant associations between self-interest and preferences.

Second, subjective self-interest was measured by asking respondents how much an issue or policy affects them. However, the measure did not distinguish between positive and negative effects so people who believed they would benefit from a policy and people who believed they would be harmed by it might report the same level of self-interest. However, these two groups of
people are likely to have very different policy preferences. As a result, the effects of subjective self-interest are likely underestimated in this study.

A third potential issue is that the study did not include measures of racial tolerance towards Latinos or Blacks, although several of the issues (immigration and affirmative action most notably) were linked to race and therefore likely associated with racial tolerance.

A final weakness is that there was a single survey question to assess all the constructs of interest, including relatively simple measures of objective self-interest. The preferences examined are complex, and a single question may not fully capture policy preferences or self-interest.

E. Effects Study 2

Using data from a survey in which residents living in suburban Chicago were asked to answer six questions about immigration policy preferences, the second study addresses some of the limitations of Study 1 by using multiple measures of a number of important constructs (e.g. objective and subjective self-interest and policy preferences) and by assessing the extent to which respondents felt they were positively or negatively affected by policies (subjective self-interest). This study also explored racial tolerance toward Latinos as a symbolic predisposition.

1. Respondents and Procedures

Data for this study come from the 2010 CAS conducted by Metro Chicago Information Center (MCIC) in collaboration with University of Illinois at Chicago students between April and August, 2010. The sample was drawn from an address-based sample frame of five Chicago-area communities, and MCIC attempted to match telephone numbers to the addresses. Students
completed 258 face-to-face interviews, and MCIC completed 789 telephone interviews with adults at least 18 years old in Highland Park, Highwood, North Chicago, Round Lake, and Waukegan (1047 total interviews). The data were weighted to adjust for the probability of selection based on number of adults in the household and the under-sampling of addresses in which researchers could not match a telephone number. The AAPOR Response Rate 1 was 14.1 percent. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The UIC Institutional Review Board approved all research procedures.

2. Measures

The complete question wordings and coding for all variables in Effects Study 2 are available in Appendix V. All independent variables were coded from 0 to 1.

Policy preferences and attitudes

Respondents’ attitudes toward immigration policies were measured with six items: the overall level of immigration, border enforcement, worksite raids, deportation, the Dream Act, and college tuition for illegal immigrants. Answers to these questions were averaged together to create an index coded so that higher values indicate greater support for pro-immigration policies. This index had an alpha reliability coefficient of .77.

Subjective Self-Interest

Four subjective self-interest questions assessed perceptions of how Latino immigrants affect: quality of life in respondents’ city, quality of public schools, crime rates, and respondents’ personal economic situation. The answers to these questions were summed together to create an index coded from maximum negative effect to maximum positive effect. This index has an alpha reliability coefficient of .68.
Objective Self-Interest

Two measures of objective self-interest were used. The first is simply whether a person is Latino or not (as in Study 1).

However, because this is a narrow assessment of self-interest, I also tested a second measure that expands upon the first variable to include being Latino, not being a citizen, and being close to an immigrant.

Symbolic Politics

Racial tolerance. Racial tolerance toward Latino immigrants was measured with a six-question index that measured positive and negative feelings toward Latino immigrants as a group. This measure incorporated themes such as work ethic/responsibility for outcomes and excessive demands that have been identified in work on racial tolerance towards Blacks (Henry and Sears 2002; Tarman and Sears 2005) and cultural and economic threat as an important theme related to immigration attitudes (Citrin et al. 1997; McLaren 2002; Brader et al. 2008; Branton et al. 2011; Newman et al. 2012). Two questions related to each of the three themes (work ethic/responsibility outcomes, excessive demands, and cultural/economic threat) were asked.

Responses to the six questions were summed to create the index, which was coded from low to high racial tolerance. The six questions used in the index have an alpha reliability coefficient of .72.

Partisanship and ideology. The survey also included measures of ideology (higher values indicating more liberal) and partisanship (dummy variables for Republican and Democrat with those identifying as Independent as the baseline group), which were used as control variables.

Control Variables
Race, political activity, education, age, gender, and income were measured as control variables.

3. **Analysis**

Using ordered logistic regression, attitudes toward immigration were regressed on objective self-interest, racial tolerance, ideology, partisanship, and the control variables. I next added subjective self-interest as a predictor in the model and tested whether subjective self-interest mediated the effects of objective self-interest and racial tolerance (using the Sobel-Goodman test). Finally, the interaction between objective self-interest and racial tolerance was tested to assess whether objective self-interest moderated the effect of racial tolerance on preferences and separate models were estimated for high and low self-interest respondents to explore the nature of this interaction. Unless otherwise specified, all models included race, political activity, education, age, gender, and income as control variables. Each model that included objective self-interest was conducted both with the more narrow measure (i.e. being an immigrant) as well as the broader measure of objective self-interest.

4. **Results**

*Main Effects of Symbolic Politics Variables*

Racial tolerance had significant effects on preferences toward immigration policies (see Table X below). It was positively associated with the immigration attitudes index, and had the largest effect on attitudes in both models (coefficients=4.00 and 4.05, both p<.01).

Ideology also had a significant, but smaller, impact on preferences, such that being more liberal was associated with more positive immigration attitudes (coefficients=.85 and .82, both
p<.01). However, the effects of ideology were not significant when the subjective self-interest was included in the model. Partisanship was not a significant predictor of immigration attitudes in any model.

Table X: OLS Regression Coefficients for Effects Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Main</th>
<th>Subjective</th>
<th>Main</th>
<th>Subjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.85** (.24)</td>
<td>.43 (.29)</td>
<td>.82** (.24)</td>
<td>.41 (.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.01 (.17)</td>
<td>.01 (.19)</td>
<td>-.02 (.17)</td>
<td>.01 (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>-.10 (.11)</td>
<td>.02 (.12)</td>
<td>-.08 (.11)</td>
<td>.03 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Tolerance</td>
<td>4.00 ** (.28)</td>
<td>2.59** (.40)</td>
<td>4.05 ** (.27)</td>
<td>2.61** (.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Interest Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective SI Index</td>
<td>1.97** (.33)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.01** (.33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective Measure</td>
<td>.78** (.15)</td>
<td>.33* (.16)</td>
<td>.66** (.12)</td>
<td>.27* (.11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 526 368 526 368
Adjusted R² = .57 .52 .57 .52

**p<.01   *p<.05   +p<.10

Main Effects of Self-Interest

The two measures of objective self-interest had significant and relatively large effects on immigration attitudes (see Table X above). Being Latino was associated with more positive immigration attitudes (coefficient=.78, p<.01). Likewise the broader measure of objective self-interest (i.e. being Latino, close to an immigrant, or not a citizen) was associated with more positive immigration attitudes (coefficient=.66, p<.01).
Subjective self-interest also had a significant and large positive effect on immigration attitudes (coefficients=1.97 and 2.01, p<.01).

Subjective Self-Interest as a Mediator

The indirect effects of racial tolerance on immigration attitudes via subjective self-interest were significant (coefficient 1.11, p<.01), and subjective self-interest mediated 26 percent of the total effect.\(^5\)

Although the main effects of ideology on policy preferences were weak, these effects were also mediated by subjective self-interest. There were significant indirect effects of ideology on immigration attitudes via subjective self-interest, and the indirect effects of ideology were larger than the direct effects (coefficient .22, p<.01).

There was also some evidence that subjective self-interest mediated the effects of objective self-interest. When objective self-interest was simply measured (i.e. whether or not the respondent was Latino), the indirect effects of objective self-interest via subjective self-interest were significant, and about 30 percent of the total effects were mediated (coefficient=.15, p<.05). However, the effects of the broader measure of objective self-interest were not mediated by subjective self-interest.

Objective Self-Interest as a Moderator

The results also demonstrate that objective self-interest can moderate the effects of racial tolerance (see Table XI below). The interaction between racial tolerance and the broader measure of objective self-interest is significant (coefficient=.85, p<.10). The effect of racial tolerance on immigration attitudes was much stronger for those high in self-interest (coefficient 4.41, p<.01) than for those low in self-interest (coefficient 3.75, p<.01). The simpler measure of objective

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\(^5\) A Sobel-Goodman test shows that racial tolerance also mediates the effects of subjective self-interest for immigration attitudes (coefficient .36, p<.01), suggesting that the two variables both cause and are influenced by the other.
self-interest did not significantly moderate the effect of ideology on immigration policy positions, but the pattern of results is similar (interaction coefficient=.41, ns). Racial tolerance more strongly predicted immigration attitudes for Latinos (coefficient=4.16, p<.01) than for non-Latinos (coefficient=3.99, p<.01).
Table XI: OLS Regression Coefficients with Interaction Terms for Effects Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Objective Measure=Latino</th>
<th>Objective Measure=Latino, Not Citizen, or Close to Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction Objective No Objective</td>
<td>Interaction Objective No Objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.83** (.25)</td>
<td>.81+ (.42) (.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>-.01 (.17)</td>
<td>-.63 (.59) (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>-.09 (.11)</td>
<td>-.27 (.23) (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Tolerance</td>
<td>4.07** (.31)</td>
<td>4.16 ** (.65) (.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Interest Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective Measure</td>
<td>.64* (.28)</td>
<td>1.00** (.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective*</td>
<td>.41 (.73)</td>
<td>.85+ (.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>526 86 440</td>
<td>526 131 395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.57 .39 .45</td>
<td>.57 .56 .42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.01  *p<.05  +p<.10
The models all control for race, political activity, education, age, gender and income.
5. Discussion

**Summary of Results**

The second study provided at least partial support for all the hypotheses. Racial tolerance (*Hypothesis 1a*) and objective and subjective self-interest (*Hypotheses 2a&b*) directly impacted people’s attitudes toward immigration. Subjective self-interest mediated the effect of objective self-interest (when operationalized as being Latino *Hypothesis 3*) and ideology and racial tolerance (*Hypothesis 4*) on immigration attitudes. Lastly, when broadly defined objective self-interest moderated the effects of racial tolerance on immigration attitudes, such that the opinions of respondents high in self-interest were more strongly affected by racial tolerance than were the opinions of respondents low in self-interest (*Hypothesis 5b*). Importantly, this last finding suggests that racial tolerance may be different than ideology and partisanship. While the former may more strongly influence the opinions of respondents high in self-interest for opinions about race and ethnicity-related issues, the latter factors may be used as heuristics among those low in self-interest to form policy preferences about issues not related to race and ethnicity.

This study also gives additional information about the measurement of both objective and subjective self-interest. One criticism of measures of objective self-interest is that it is difficult to capture the full range of objective ways that issues may affect individuals. The results suggest that how researchers measure objective self-interest impacts the effects of the variable. In addition, the findings in this study suggest the importance of measuring not only how much respondents believe an issue will affect them, but also how they will be affected (positively or negatively). The results of this study provided much greater support for the hypotheses about subjective self-interest than did those of Study 1 in which the direction of the perceived effects of policies was not assessed. Finally, the inclusion of multi-item indices to measure several key
constructs increased the reliability of the measures and resulted in stronger evidence supporting several key hypotheses.

Limitations

One potential limitation of Studies 1 and 2 are that both were fielded only in the Chicago area. These surveys have the advantage of holding the local context consistent across respondents, and local social, political and economic factors likely impact people’s beliefs about issues such as immigration, gentrification, or school funding. However, the single area sample offers less external validity than a representative national sample. Local media or politics could prime people’s self-interest more or less than national media or politics, and the effects of self-interest could differ across the country.

Despite this small sample size, Study 2 highlighted the strong direct effects of subjective self-interest on preferences and showed that subjective self-interest mediated the effects of symbolic predispositions such as ideology and racial tolerance. In addition, the use of two different measures of objective self-interest demonstrated that operationalization impacted its relationship to subjective self-interest, symbolic factors and preferences.

F. Effects Study 3

The third study addressed several of the limitations in Study 2 by using data from 18 large nationally representative surveys conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2011 and 2012 (thus increasing sample size and power). This study also tests the impacts of self-interest on one of the most salient and politically contentious issues in recent years: the Affordable Care Act (ACA).
1. **Respondents and Procedures**

The data comes from 18 Kaiser Family Foundation tracking polls conducted during the 21-month period prior to the 2012 Presidential Election (Feb. 2011 to Oct. 2012). Each survey includes about 1,200 respondents, and the combined dataset features more than 23,000 respondents. Each of the monthly surveys features a nationally representative random digit dial telephone sample of adults in the United States. The samples for the surveys include both landline and cell phones, and interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. The data were weighted to account for differences in probability of selection. In addition, the data was weighted for sex, age, education, race, and region based on estimates from the Census Bureau’s 2011 American Community Survey. The data were accessed via the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2014).

2. **Measures**

The complete question wordings and coding for all variables in Effects Study 3 are available in Appendix VI. All independent variables were coded from 0 to 1.

*Policy Attitudes*

The main dependent variable measures opinions toward the ACA with higher values indicating a more favorable view.

*Subjective Self-Interest*

Subjective self-interest was measured by asking respondents whether they and their family would be better off, worse off or unaffected by the law. The variable was coded with higher values indicating the perception of a more positive effect.

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6 The data include a survey for each month during that period except March 2011, August 2011 and June 2012. Kaiser surveys in those three months did not include all the analytical variables.
Objective Self-Interest

As in past research, this study used people’s health insurance status as a measure of objective self-interest (Sears et al. 1980; Lau and Heldman 2009), such that those without health insurance will be more affected by the ACA than those with health insurance. However, this measure of objective self-interest is problematic. The ACA requires that everyone obtain health insurance or pay a fine, so people without insurance may dislike the plan because they do not want to have to pay this fine. However, the law also imposes additional taxes on some existing health insurance plans, so people with insurance may oppose the law because they do not want to pay these additional taxes. Thus, the implications of insurance status for opinions about this law are not straightforward.

Symbolic Politics

Political ideology (higher values indicating more liberal) and partisanship (higher values indicating more Democrat) served as measures of symbolic politics.

Control Variables

Education, age, household income, race, gender, and month of interview served as control variables.

3. Analysis

Using ordered logistic regression, attitudes toward the ACA were regressed on objective self-interest, ideology, and partisanship, and control variables. Subjective self-interest was then included in the model, as well, and I tested whether subjective self-interest mediated the effects of partisanship and ideology on attitudes. Next, interactions between partisanship and health insurance status and between ideology and health insurance status were tested, and separate
regressions were estimated for people with and without health insurance to explore the nature of these interactions.

4. Results

Main Effects of Symbolic Politics Variables

Respondents who identified as liberal were more likely to view the ACA more favorably than those who identified as conservative (coefficient=.93, p<.01; see Table XII). Likewise, respondents who identified as Democrats were more likely to view the ACA favorably than those who identified as Republicans (coefficient=2.65, p<.01).

Main Effects of Self-Interest

Objective self-interest did not significantly affect attitudes toward the ACA (see Table XII). This finding is consistent with past evidence that insurance status is not a strong predictor of views about government health care policies (Sears et. al. 1980; Lau and Heldman 2009).

In contrast, subjective self-interest had a strong and significant impact on respondents’ attitudes toward the ACA (see Table XI). People who think they will benefit because of the law were more favorable toward the law than people who believe they will be harmed (coefficient=3.47, p<.01). The size of these effects is much larger than the effects of either partisanship or ideology.
Table XII: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Effects Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Main Effects Models</th>
<th>Objective SI Interaction Models</th>
<th>Split by Objective SI Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Subjective SI</td>
<td>Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No Insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>.93** (.05)</td>
<td>.67** (.06)</td>
<td>.92** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>2.65** (.06)</td>
<td>1.79** (.06)</td>
<td>1.84** (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Interest Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective SI</td>
<td>.07 (.06)</td>
<td>.17** (.06)</td>
<td>-.53** (.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective SI (Insurance)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective SI* Ideology</td>
<td>.36* (.15)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.16 (.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective SI* Partisanship</td>
<td>.96** (.14)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.93** (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>16,730</td>
<td>16,318</td>
<td>16,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.01    *p<.05    +p<.10.
Subjective Self-Interest as a Mediator

The indirect effect of partisanship on people’s attitudes via subjective self-interest was significant, and about 45 percent of the total effect was mediated (coefficient=.23, p<.01). Likewise, the indirect effect of ideology on people’s attitudes via subjective self-interest was significant, and about 43 percent of the total effect was mediated (coefficient=.07, p<.01). Lastly, the indirect effect of insurance status on attitudes via subjective self-interest was also significant (coefficient=.01, p<.01). The findings show that ideology, partisanship and insurance status all impact how people perceive the law will affect them, and these beliefs influence their policy preferences.

Objective Self-Interest as a Moderator

Consistent with expectations, insurance status also moderated the effects of partisanship (interaction coefficient=.96, p<.01) and ideology (interaction coefficient=.36, p<.05) (see Table XII). The effect of partisanship on attitudes toward the ACA was larger for people with insurance (coefficient=2.85, p<.01) than people without (coefficient=1.71, p<.01). Similarly, the effect of ideology was larger among people with insurance (coefficient=.95, p<.01) than among those without (coefficient=.82, p<.01).

5. Discussion

Summary of Results

The results of Study 3 provide strong support for all five hypotheses. Partisanship and ideology both had strong direct effects on views toward the ACA (Hypothesis 1b). Subjective self-interest had a strong influence on attitudes about the law (Hypothesis 2b). Subjective self-interest also mediated the effects of insurance status (Hypothesis 3), ideology, and partisanship
on opinions about the ACA (*Hypothesis 4*). Lastly, objective self-interest moderated the effects of ideology and partisanship so that ideology and partisanship had less effect on the attitudes of people without insurance (*Hypothesis 5a*).

Although study three examines attitudes toward only one policy, the ACA provides a strong test of whether self-interest impacts preferences. The law received significant publicity from politicians and the media throughout 2011 and 2012, and it became highly politicized as Democratic leaders tended to support the law and Republican leaders tended to oppose it. At the same time, many people did not have a clear understanding of the contents or effects of the law during this time. Only 18 percent of respondents in a June 2012 Pew Research survey said they understood what was in the health care law “very well,” and 31 percent of the respondents reported understanding “not too well” or “not well at all” (Pew Research 2012). The strong partisan polarization and lack of public understanding likely increase the effects of factors such as partisanship and ideology on preferences, and reduce the likelihood of finding associations between self-interest and preferences.

G. Discussion

The results from these three studies illustrate that self-interest can have significant direct and indirect effects on people’s preferences across a range of issues, even when controlling for symbolic political variables. The findings provide support for all five of the hypotheses. Replicating past research, symbolic politics had significant direct effects on preferences in all three studies (*Hypotheses 1a and 1b*).

In addition, objective self-interest influenced policy positions in two of the three studies in which it was measured (*Hypothesis 2a*), even though most measures of objective self-interest
were relatively simple as in past research. In Study 2, the operationalization of objective self-interest influenced its effects on policy preferences. This suggests that future research should ask multiple questions to assess the multiple ways that policies can affect people.

These three studies also illustrate that objective self-interest differs from subjective self-interest. The correlations between objective and subjective self-interest were weak: Study 1: school funding: $r=.28$, $p<.01$; gentrification: $r=-.07$, $p<.10$; affirmative action: $r=.25$, $p<.01$; and immigration: $r=.18$, $p<.10$; Study 2: simple objective self-interest measure: $r=.21$, $p<.01$; broader objective self-interest measure: $r=.11$, $p<.01$; Study 3: $r=-.08$, $p<.01$. Furthermore, objective and subjective self-interest had independent effects on policy preferences, providing additional evidence that these are distinct constructs and that researchers studying self-interest should consider measuring both.

When the measure of subjective self-interest assessed the direction of the perceived effects (in Studies 2 and 3), subjective self-interest predicted policy positions and attitudes (Hypothesis 2b) and subjective self-interest mediated the effects of objective self-interest and symbolic politics variables (Hypotheses 3 & 4), suggesting that it is important to measure subjective self-interest appropriately. Evidence that subjective self-interest mediated the effects of symbolic politics also points to the complexity of the relationship between these two forces and the importance of considering possible causal links between self-interest and symbolic predispositions in addition to considering their effects on policy preferences and attitudes.

Finally, objective self-interest indirectly influenced policy preferences and attitudes in all three studies (although not for every issue) by moderating the effect of symbolic politics variables. Specifically, in Studies 1 and 3, ideology more strongly influenced policy preferences and attitudes among those who are not directly affected by an issue than among those who are
directly affected by it (*Hypothesis 5a*). In contrast, in Study 2, racial tolerance more strongly influenced policy preferences and attitudes among respondents who *are* directly affected by an issue or policy than among respondents who are not directly affected (*Hypothesis 5b*). These results suggest that the most interesting effects of objective self-interest may be as a moderator of other predictors of policy preferences.

However, there are several potential directions for future research. First, in only one of the studies was racial tolerance measured. Additional studies should be conducted to replicate these findings regarding objective self-interest as a moderator of the effect of symbolic predispositions and racial tolerance. In addition, the hypotheses about the effects of ideology and racial tolerance for high and low self-interest individuals are based on the argument that the former are likely to form policy preferences through more thoughtful elaboration than are the latter. However, there is no direct evidence in these studies about the extent of elaboration on which policy preferences were based. Future work could more directly test this explanation.

**H. Conclusion**

Many political scientists have argued that self-interest does not widely influence policy preferences and attitudes (Sears and Funk 1991; Lau and Heldman 2009). This research suggests that this conclusion is premature. Self-interest is a complex construct, and its operationalization is critical when studying attitudes. The results confirm that it is difficult to identify single measures of objective self-interest and that sometimes these measures (e.g. insurance status) have little direct impact on preferences. However, the study repeatedly shows both objective and subjective self-interest can affect opinions when a more nuanced theoretical perspective of self-interest is adopted. In particular, the results show subjective self-interest can have significant
direct effects on preferences and can mediate the effects of other factors such as ideology. In addition to direct effects for many issues, objective self-interest also influences preferences by moderating the effects of symbolic predispositions. Specifically, partisanship and political ideology have greater influences on the preferences of respondents whose self-interest is not engaged, whereas racial tolerance has greater effects in those whose self-interest is engaged. These findings are consistent with the idea that partisanship/ideology are heuristics and the effects of racial tolerance on preferences are the result of a more thoughtful process, but more research is needed to understand these processes. In short, when comprehensive measures of self-interest (including both objective and subjective self-interest) are used, self-interest has important direct and indirect effects on policy preferences. Researchers should attempt to develop more realistically complex models of the role of self-interest in public opinion.
A. **Background**

The dominant finding in political science that self-interest has little impact people’s attitudes (Sears and Funk 1991) is at odds with policymakers’ frequent appeals to Americans’ self-interest. Policymakers and political campaigns often highlight how different policies will impact individuals. For example, in a September 2009 speech to the nation about health care reform, President Barack Obama argued:

“If you are among the hundreds of millions of Americans who already have health insurance…nothing in our plan requires you to change what you have…What this plan will do is make the insurance you have work better for you…Now, if you're one of the tens of millions of Americans who don't currently have health insurance, the second part of this plan will finally offer you quality, affordable choices. If you lose your job or you change your job, you'll be able to get coverage” (Obama 2009).

Likewise, President Ronald Reagan illustrated how his tax reform proposal would affect different individuals in a May 1985 speech:

“Will our proposal help you? You bet it will… As you can see, the percentage of income tax owed would come down, way down, for those earning less than $15,000… Then no matter how much more you earned, you would pay 35 cents on any dollar … Now, let's look at some examples of families in different income groups to illustrate how dramatically these incentives could help you to better your lives” (Reagan 1985).

These speeches illustrate how politicians often frame policy proposals in terms of self-interest. Entman (2004) explains that framing is “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or
issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (p. 5). Politicians and the media often frame news or issues in a certain context, and the same issue or event can often be framed in several different contexts. For example, a Klu Klux Klan rally could be framed as a freedom of speech event or as a hate speech event. Likewise, a property tax increase for education funding could be framed as a loss of money for citizens or as a boost to schools. Research shows the framing of political policies can have significant effects on people’s preferences and opinions (Zaller 1992; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Nelson et al. 1997; Chong and Druckman 2007a).

B. Framing Effects

Researchers in political science and communications have extensively explored the effects of framing on policy preferences and attitudes, but almost none of this research has examined the impact of messages about people’s self-interest on policy preferences. However, a wealth of research shows that frames can influence preferences, and contextual factors as well as the type of frames impact their effectiveness. Frames can change both the importance individuals attach to different beliefs and the content of people’s beliefs (Zaller 1992; Nelson and Oxley 1999). Framing effects are impacted by the credibility of the source (Druckman 2001), partisan cues (Slothus and de Vreese 2010), issue salience (Knoll et al. 2011) and competing information (Druckman and Nelson 2003; Druckman 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007b,c). In addition, the effect of frame can be moderated by individuals’ political knowledge (Brewer 2003; Druckman and Nelson 2003; Miller and Krosnick 2000) and political values (Brewer 2001; Brewer 2003).

The framing literature shows that a variety of different types of frames appealing to particular individuals can influence attitudes. Frames appealing to the identity of a social or
racial group can impact opinions about group-related policies (Kinder and Sanders 1990; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Jacoby 2000; Jacoby 2006; Transue 2007). Likewise, frames highlighting the importance of a particular political value or belief can affect people’s preferences (Nelson et. al. 1997; Brewer 2002; Brewer 2001; Barker 2005; Brewer and Gross 2005). However, there is little evidence of whether frames appealing to people’s personal interest can impact opinions.

There have been only a couple of published studies testing the effects of self-interest on policy preferences experimentally, and such research has used implicit primes, rather than explicitly framed messages appealing to self-interest. For example, asking people about their personal economic situation on a questionnaire before asking them about candidates or economic policies led people’s self-interest to have a significant effect on their preferences (Sears and Lau 1983). Likewise, people who were asked to think about how various proposals such as mortgage tax deductions would impact them had preferences more consistent with their self-interest than those who did not receive priming questions in a survey experiment (Chong et al. 2001). In these two studies, the primes encouraged the respondent to think about their self-interest, which likely increased the accessibility of self-interest considerations.

That is not to say that self-interest (sometimes called relevance or involvement) has not been successfully experimentally manipulated. Psychology studies have shown that people’s involvement with an issue can impact the effects of persuasive messages (Petty and Cacioppo 1979; Petty et al. 1981; Johnson and Eagly 1989). Many such psychology studies have manipulated self-interest by using university students as subjects and framing potential policy changes as happening at either the students’ own university (self-interest or involvement) or at another distant university (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo 1979; Petty et al. 1981; Axsom et al. 1987; Burnkrant and Howard 1984; Leippe and Elkin 1987; Schul and Knapp 1984; Sorrentino et al.
1988). More recently, psychology research has also explored how manipulating self-interest or relevance impacts elaboration and processing of persuasive messages (Petty and Cacioppo 1984; Petty and Cacioppo 1990; Boninger et al. 1995; Petty et al. 1997).

However, neither these psychology studies nor political science research have attempted to change people’s perceptions about how a policy would impact them or explicitly appeal to their self-interest. Frames appealing to self-interest have the potential to alter how people perceive a policy will impact them (either harm or benefit them), which could change both the content of their beliefs and the relative weight of importance they assign to self-interest. At the end of their study, Chong et al. (2001) conclude that researchers “need to explore how the behavior of politicians and the media can modify the link between the objective circumstances and perceptions of self-interest and elevate or diminish the power of self-regarding motives” (p. 564).

C. Research Design

Framing provides a mechanism to address these issues and isolate the effects of self-interest on preferences. This chapter connects the self-interest and framing literatures with three studies of people’s preferences toward health care, taxes and immigration policies. Past research has found the effects of self-interest vary across these three issue areas. In particular, self-interest has been found to have a strong affect on attitude toward tax policies (Sears and Citrin 1982; Sears and Funk 1991), mixed influence on health care preferences (Sears et al. 1980; Sears and Funk 1991; Lau and Heldman 2009) and little impact on immigration attitudes (Sears and Funk 1991; Citrin et al. 1997). These three issues also provide a strong test of the effects of self-interest because they are highly salient and politically divisive topics. Most respondents have
probably heard some debate and/or formed some opinions about these issues. As a result, it will be more difficult to change opinions about these issues than less salient or debated topics.

Framing experiments also offer the opportunity to examine the influence of self-interest on preferences in different information contexts. People often receive information about politics in various ways. Sometimes people receive a single message/frame about a policy, and in other cases, people receive competing messages/frames about an issue. Past research shows that the information context (standalone or competing) can influence the effect of frames (Chong and Druckman 2007a,b; Chong and Druckman 2010; Baum 2013). In this chapter, self-interest frames are presented both in a standalone context and with a conflicting value or self-interest message.

The three studies in this chapter build upon each other, and combine to show how self-interest frames affect attitudes. The first study featured frames with relatively subjective messages about how policies would benefit respondents. It highlights how self-interest messages can influence preferences in both a standalone and competitive context. Study 2 has frames with more objective and concrete messages about how policies would affect respondents, and the certainty and magnitude of these effects were manipulated. In addition, this study examined the effects of self-interest frames on respondents’ perceptions of how the policies would impact them. Study 2 illustrates how the framing of material benefits/costs impact the effectiveness of self-interest messages, and it demonstrates the relationship between respondents’ policy attitudes and beliefs about how the policy will affect them. Study 3 used frames targeted to respondents based on objective characteristics such as age and income. It shows how frames influence preferences and perceptions of policy impact for respondents with an objective interest and those without such an interest. The collective results of these three framing studies demonstrate the
need to reconsider the impact of self-interest on people’s preferences.

D. **Hypotheses**

Past studies provide some limited evidence that self-interest frames could impact attitudes toward policies. Researchers have theorized that the complexity of many policies prevents people from understanding their self-interest when forming preferences (Sears et al. 1980; Sears and Funk 1991; Lau and Heldman 2009). However, politicians and the media can frame how policies influence people and make people’s self-interest more clear and salient (Chong 2000). As discussed previously, several studies demonstrate that questions and messages priming people’s personal situation can increase the influence of self-interest on people’s policy preferences (Sears and Lau 1983; Chong et al. 2001). Likewise, several frames appealing to people’s self-interest influence attitudes toward privatizing Social Security in a study on policy consequences (Jerit 2009). These findings illustrate the potential for self-interest frames to affect preferences.

**Hypothesis 1**: Self-interest frames will affect support for policy proposals relative to a control no-frame condition, such that framing a policy as beneficial will increase support for the policy and framing the policy as harmful will reduce support for the policy.

People usually receive multiple messages about policies, and these messages often conflict or compete. Research shows that conflicting message frames can mitigate the impact of frames on attitudes (Chong and Druckman 2007a,b; Chong and Druckman 2010; Baum 2013). During political debates, self-interest messages often conflict or compete with other self-interest messages or value messages. However, past studies have often focused on the independent effects of self-interest and political values on preferences and do not explore their impact in a
competitive context (Sears and Funk 1991; Lau and Heldman 2009). The information context of a self-interest or value frame likely impacts its influence on preferences, and conflicting messages likely weaken the effects of frames.

Hypothesis 2: In a competitive context, the effects of self-interest frames on preferences will be mitigated when paired with a conflicting value or self-interest frame.

Past studies show the stability of political attitudes often varies based on people’s political values and belief structures. Converse (1964) found that people without strong ideological belief systems demonstrated more attitude instability and change over time than ideologues or people with strong beliefs. Likewise, Zaller argued that people with strong political values or ideologies were more likely to resist new information and less likely to change their opinions due to new information (Zaller 1992). On an aggregate level, Stimson showed that shifts in public opinion are often due to changes in attitudes of those who are less ideological or passionate about politics (Stimson 2004). These findings indicate the effects of self-interest frames on political policy preferences may be stronger among respondents without strong political ideologies.

Hypothesis 3: The effects of self-interest frames on preferences will be more consistently significant among self-identified moderates than among those who identify as strongly liberal or conservative.

E. Framing Study 1

The first study uses six survey framing experiments to test how self-interest and value frames affect people’s attitudes toward policies in three domains: taxes, health care and
immigration (framing experiments were conducted for two policies in each of these three domains).

1. **Respondents and Procedures**

   The data for Study 1 came from an exit poll survey conducted on April 9, 2013. Research volunteers received responses from 1,063 registered voters in Illinois. Volunteers surveyed voters at 28 randomly selected polling places for municipal elections in three Chicago suburbs: Des Plaines, Elmhurst and Maywood. The self-administered paper-and-pencil survey had 40 questions and took respondents about 10 minutes to complete. About 60 volunteers distributed the surveys, and the estimated response rate at different polling places varied from 20 percent to 60 percent. The sample of suburban voters was older, wealthier, and more educated than the general population (See Appendix XIV).

2. **Framing Experiment Design**

   All respondents participated in six framing experiments, and the order of the experiments rotated across respondents based on 24 different question order combinations (See Appendix IX). In addition, the six experimental questions were not asked consecutively, and there were at least three questions between each set of experimental questions. Each of the six framing experiments involved a policy proposal: Medicare cuts, Medicaid expansion, property tax increases, income tax increases, restrictions on highly-skilled foreigner workers, and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. Each experiment included four conditions: a control message (no frame) condition, a self-interest frame condition, a value/ideological frame condition, and a competing frames condition which included conflicting value and self-interest frames. The
frames are listed in Appendix VIII. In the self-interest and value framing conditions, the frames are all favorable toward the proposed policy. In the competing conditions, the self-interest portion of the frame is favorable and value portion unfavorable for one policy in each domain (Medicaid expansion, property tax increases and path to citizenship). For the other three policies, the value portion of the competing frame is favorable and the self-interest portion is unfavorable.

All of the policy proposals and frames are based on both media reports and in-depth interviews exploring people’s attitudes toward immigration, health care and tax policies (see Appendix VII). The self-interest frames feature messages highlighting the potential personal benefits of the policy to respondents. Each of the frames explicitly states how the policy would benefit “you,” “people like you,” “your community” or “your family.” Some of the self-interest frames highlight more material benefits such as lower taxes (Medicare cuts) and lower costs of goods/services (path to citizenship) while other frames feature more subjective benefits such as improved health care (Medicaid expansion) and more roads and parks in community (property tax increase). The value frames are designed to appeal to people’s core political values, which are based on their beliefs about government, citizenship and society (see Appendix VIII for listing of all frames).

At the end of the survey after the experimental questions, the survey featured a series of demographic questions about respondents’ sex, education, income, age, race, partisanship, and ideology. All of the question wordings and coding are in Appendix VIII.

3. **Analysis**

The mean level of support for each policy was calculated separately for the control, value frame, self-interest frame, and competing frame groups. Then, ordered logistic regressions were
conducted predicting respondents’ policy preferences for each of the six proposed policies. Dummy variables were included that indicated whether respondents received a self-interest frame, competitive frame, or the value frame (the no frame control group was the baseline comparison group). These models also controlled for partisanship, age, income, education, gender, race, and ideology. Lastly, respondents were grouped by self-identified ideology and mean levels of support were analyzed for potential differences in the effects of frames across groups.

4. **Results**

_Main Framing Effects of Policy Preferences_

The mean level of support for the control and treatment groups highlights the large effects of the self-interest frames on preferences toward tax and health care policies (see Table XIII below). With the self-interest frame, the average level of support for income tax increases rose from 2.17 to 2.69 and the average level of support for property tax increases rose from 1.90 to 2.34 (see column 1 and column 2 of Table XIII). Likewise, support for Medicare cuts rose from 1.99 to 2.41 and support for Medicaid expansion increased from 3.79 to 3.93 with the self-interest frames (see column 3 and column 4 of Table XIII). In contrast, the level of support limiting work visas (3.19 to 3.10) and path to citizenship (3.13 to 3.11) did not increase with the self-interest frames (see column 5 and column 6 of Table XIII).
Table XIII: Mean Support for Policies for Framing Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Income tax increase</th>
<th>Property tax increase</th>
<th>Cuts to Medicare</th>
<th>Expand Medicaid</th>
<th>Limit work visas</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>2.17 (260)</td>
<td>1.90 (262)</td>
<td>1.99 (255)</td>
<td>3.79 (249)</td>
<td>3.19 (254)</td>
<td>3.13 (252)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value frame</td>
<td>2.62 (249)</td>
<td>2.29 (247)</td>
<td>2.31 (255)</td>
<td>3.83 (256)</td>
<td>3.50 (247)</td>
<td>3.29 (261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Interest Frames</td>
<td>2.69 (248)</td>
<td>2.34 (254)</td>
<td>2.41 (256)</td>
<td>3.93 (246)</td>
<td>3.10 (257)</td>
<td>3.11 (249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing Frames</td>
<td>2.58 (259)</td>
<td>2.40 (260)</td>
<td>2.12 (249)</td>
<td>3.51 (252)</td>
<td>3.17 (247)</td>
<td>3.16 (253)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means based on a 6-point answer scale with 1=strongly oppose and 6=strongly support.

In the multivariate logistic regressions models, the mean level of support in the self-interest frame condition was higher than in the no frame control condition for four of the six policy proposals (see row 1 of Table XIV below). Support for the two health care proposals and the two tax proposals were higher, on average, than support for these policies in the control condition (see columns 1-4 of Table XIV). However, the self-interest frames did not have a significant effect on preferences toward either immigration policy proposal (see column 5 and column 6 of Table XIV).

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7 When adding a variable to control for question order to the models, the order variable did not have any consistently significant effects on policy support.
Table XIV: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support for Framing Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Income tax increase (pro value in competing)</th>
<th>Property tax increase (pro self-interest in competing)</th>
<th>Cuts to Medicare (pro value in competing)</th>
<th>Expand Medicaid (pro self-interest in competing)</th>
<th>Limit work visas (pro value in competing)</th>
<th>Path to citizenship (pro self-interest in competing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Interest Frame</strong></td>
<td>.73**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.78**</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>(.19)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Value Frame</strong></td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>(.19)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competing Self-Interest Frames</strong></td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>-.31+</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>(.18)</td>
<td>(.19)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>876</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All models control for sex, education, income, age, race, partisanship, and ideology.
**=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

Effects of Self-Interest Frames in Competitive Context

The findings demonstrate that conflicting value messages can sometimes, but not always, mitigate the effects of positive self-interest messages on preferences (see Table XIV). Negative value messages were paired in two cases with positive self-interest messages that were associated with significant increases in support (property tax increases and expanding Medicaid). With property tax increases, the positive effects of the self-interest message on preferences remained significant despite the negative value message (see column 2 of Table XIV). In contrast, the negative value message completely eliminated the significant positive effects of the self-interest message on preferences toward Medicaid expansion. Moreover, the conflicting condition was associated with a significant decline in support for Medicaid expansion when compared with the control group (see column 4 of Table XIV). The conflicting condition for path to citizenship was insignificant (see column 6 of Table XIV), but the positive self-interest message was also insignificant when presented alone. In short, the negative value message
eliminated the significant effects on preferences of the positive self-interest message with the Medicaid expansion proposal but not with property tax increase proposal.

The findings demonstrate that self-interest messages can sometimes, but not always, mitigate the effects of positive value messages on preferences (see Table XIV above). Negative self-interest messages were paired in three cases with positive value messages that were associated with significant increases in support for preferences in the noncompeting value frames conditions (income tax increases, Medicare cuts and limits to work visas). With Medicare cuts, the negative self-interest frame eliminated the significant increase in support for the policy associated with the positive value frame (see column 3 of Table XIV). Likewise, the negative self-interest frame completely offset the increase in support for limiting foreign workers associated with the positive value frame (see column 5 of Table XIV). However, the negative self-interest frame did not significantly attenuate the increase in support for income tax increases associated with the positive value frame (see column 1 of Table XIV). These results show that a conflicting self-interest frame can mitigate the effects of value frames in some, but not all, cases.

Differences in Framing Effects and Respondent Ideology

The results reveal that the impact of self-interest frames on preferences varied based on respondents’ self-identified political ideology (see Table XV below). In particular, self-interest frames had more consistently significant effects on the preferences of self-identified political moderates than on the preferences of either conservatives or liberals. Self-interest frames were associated with larger increases in average support for policies among moderates than liberals or conservatives for all of the six policies except limiting foreign workers. With difference of means tests, the self-interest frames were associated with a significant increase in support among moderates for three issues (Medicare cuts, income tax increases and property tax increases), and
a nearly significant increase in support for Medicaid expansion (see columns 1-4 of Table XV). In contrast, self-interest frames were associated with a significant increase in support among liberals for only the two tax proposals and among conservatives for only the property tax increase proposal. The findings illustrate that self-interest frames had a more consistently significant influence on the preferences of people with moderate political ideologies than people with more conservative or liberal ideologies. However, these differences in effects of the self-interest frames across ideological groups was not significant when an interaction term between ideology and self-interest was included in the model for each issues. Ideology likely did not have a statistically significant influence on the effects of self-interest frames because the messages increased support for the policies among all three ideological groups (even though the increase was not significant in some cases).

Table XV: Mean Support for Policies by Respondent Ideology for Framing Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Income tax increase</th>
<th>Property tax increase</th>
<th>Cuts to Medicare</th>
<th>Expand Medicaid</th>
<th>Limit work visas</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1.90 (92)</td>
<td>1.71 (75)</td>
<td>2.35 (75)</td>
<td>3.21 (90)</td>
<td>3.56 (78)</td>
<td>2.33 (75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2.13 (98)</td>
<td>1.65 (89)</td>
<td>1.86 (92)</td>
<td>3.87 (82)</td>
<td>3.27 (84)</td>
<td>3.02 (82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2.59 (70)</td>
<td>2.29 (98)</td>
<td>1.82 (88)</td>
<td>4.39 (77)</td>
<td>2.80 (92)</td>
<td>4.04 (85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Interest Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1.91 (92)</td>
<td>2.09+ (78)</td>
<td>2.74 (74)</td>
<td>3.21 (80)</td>
<td>3.32 (67)</td>
<td>2.23 (91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td><strong>2.64</strong> (73)</td>
<td><strong>2.17</strong> (88)</td>
<td><strong>2.52</strong> (86)</td>
<td>3.99 (79)</td>
<td>3.14 (90)</td>
<td>3.28 (82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td><strong>3.39</strong> (95)</td>
<td>2.74+ (88)</td>
<td>2.06 (96)</td>
<td>4.54 (87)</td>
<td>2.90 (100)</td>
<td>3.99 (76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test results: **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.1
5. **Discussion**

The results from Study 1 demonstrate that self-interest frames can influence people’s policy preferences in both standalone and competitive contexts across a variety of issues. In addition, the findings show that self-interest frames can have different effects on respondents based on their political ideologies. The experimental findings provide support for two of the three research hypotheses.

Self-interest frames were associated with significant changes in preferences for the two health care policies and the two tax policies in a standalone context. These findings support *Hypothesis 1*, and show that self-interest frames can impact attitudes. For these issues, the effects of self-interest frames on preferences were comparable in magnitude to the effects of value frames on preferences. Past research shows value frames can have a strong influence on preferences (Nelson et. al. 1997; Brewer 2002; Brewer and Gross 2005), and these findings indicate that self-interest frames could have an equally strong impact on people’s attitudes.

Self-interest frames had significant effects on preferences when highlighting both objective/material benefits and when featuring more subjective benefits. The Medicare cuts frame (lower taxes) and income tax increase frame (more money for government programs benefitting respondents) were examples of frames appealing to people’s material interest that were associated with significant changes. At the same time, the property tax frame (better roads and parks for the community) and the Medicaid expansion frame (better health care) were examples of frames appealing to more subjective interests that were associated with changes in preferences.

The significant effects of positive self-interest frames on preferences were not mitigated in a competitive context. These results provide evidence contrary to *Hypothesis 2*, and illustrate
that the effects of self-interest frames can persist in the face of opposing messages. The significant effects of positive self-interest messages remained significant for property tax increases and expanding Medicaid, even when paired with negative value messages. Although some past studies show that opposing messages can mitigate the effects of frames (Chong and Druckman 2007a,b; Chong and Druckman 2010), the conflicting results from this study could be due to the nature of self-interest and value messages. Research shows that concrete messages (i.e. self-interest frames) are more persuasive than abstract messages (i.e. value frames) when a decision is imminent while the reverse is true if a decision is distant (Fujita et al. 2008; Kim et al. 2009).

The results from Study 1 illustrate that self-interest frames had a more consistently significant impact on the preferences of people who identify as ideologically moderate than those who identify as liberal or conservative politically. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 3 and show that people’s political ideological beliefs can moderate the effects of self-interest frames on preferences.

Limitations

Study 1 had several limitations. First, it only tested two policies in each issue area, and it had a limited number of competitive contexts. In political campaigns, self-interest messages often face competing value and competing self-interest messages. That is to say that for some issues, one politician may frame the policy as being beneficial to citizens’ interests and another may frame the same issue as being harmful to the same citizens’ interests. In addition, the self-interest frames in Study 1 all attempted to boost support for policy proposals that tend to be relatively unpopular. However, self-interest messages could also be used to decrease support for policy positions.
Another limitation with the study was that the self-interest frames include some benefits that were relatively subjective. For example, the property tax frame declared the policy would fund “roads and parks in your community,” and some people may have perceived this as more of a community benefit than a personal benefit. More tangible/objective gains or losses could reduce variation in respondents’ perceptions of potential policy effects.

Lastly, the study does not conclusively show how or why the self-interest frames impact people’s opinions. In particular, the results do not test whether the shifts in preferences were associated with changes in people’s perceptions about how the policy would affect them. Without a manipulation check, the study does not definitively explain exactly why self-interest frames were associated with changes in preferences.

Despite these limitations, Study 1 illustrates that self-interest messages were associated with changes in opinion across information contexts, respondents and issues. This is an important finding because it provides strong evidence that self-interest does influence policy preferences, contrary to much of the literature that has relied on correlational analysis of cross-sectional data. These experiments provide strong evidence that believing a policy will be beneficial leads to greater support for that policy.

F. Framing Study 2

The second study addresses several of the limitations of the first study, and provides more evidence of how self-interest messages influence people’s preferences toward tax, immigration and health care policies. Study 2 featured self-interest messages with more tangible individual benefits/costs than Study 1. Self-interest frames were also designed to both increase and decrease support for different policies. In Study 2, self-interest frames were tested in
different competitive contexts, including against conflicting value messages and against conflicting self-interest messages. Lastly, a manipulation-check question in Study 2 illustrated how self-interest messages influence people’s perceptions of the impact of the policy on themselves.

Framing Study 2 was also designed to test whether differences in the magnitude and certainty of potential policy costs/benefits for respondents impacted the effectiveness of self-interest frames on preferences.

1. **Respondents and Procedures**

The data is based on two surveys conducted via the Amazon Mechanical Turk web site. With Mechanical Turk, people can be recruited to complete online tasks such as a survey. People who register as workers on the web site have access to a list of tasks they are eligible to complete (based on factors such as their location or skills). Workers can read a short description of the task and see how much money they will receive for completing the task. Research shows Mechanical Turk offers a more valid sample for political attitude studies than student or convenience samples and is significantly less expensive than Internet probability samples (Berinsky et al. 2012). Likewise, Leeper and Mullinix (2014) show that with framing experiments there is little difference between convenience samples and probability samples in regards to findings of framing effects (Leeper and Mullinix 2014).

The first survey ran from February 3, 2014, to February 7, 2014, and received 1,084 responses (1,044 fully completed). This survey included framing experiment questions related to eliminating capital gains, raising the eligibility age of Medicare and providing immigrants a path to citizenship. The second survey ran from March 3, 2014, to March 10, 2014, and received
1,073 responses (1,028 fully complete). This survey included framing experiment questions related to raising estate taxes, creating a single-payer health care system, and increasing border security.

The only eligibility requirements for respondents were that they were 18 years old and living in the United States. Respondents received 25 cents for completing each survey, and each survey took respondents, on average, about three and a half minutes to complete. On each survey, there was a question after the framing questions but before the demographic section designed to check whether respondents were reading the questions (it instructed respondents what answer choice to select). In both surveys, 96 percent of respondents answered the check question correctly. Both survey samples are younger, whiter, more male, and more liberal than the general population (see Appendix XIV). However, the study sample is consistent with other surveys conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk.

2. Framing Experiment Design

The information context of the messages was varied for each of the six survey experiment questions. As in Study 1, the policy proposals and frames in the experiment were designed based on real political plans and arguments. All the self-interest frames highlight the cost or benefit of the proposal for “you,” and they all feature a concrete cost/benefit for respondents. For example, the self-interest benefits included making it easier to save for retirement (eliminating capital gains taxes) and ensuring Medicare benefits are available (raising Medicare eligibility age) while the self-interest costs included higher taxes (path to citizenship). The proposals and frames were based on fifty in-depth interviews focused on people’s beliefs about tax, health care and immigration policies (see Appendix X for details on frame
development). As in Study 1, the value frames appeal to common political values such as
fairness, opportunity, freedom, or law and order (Feldman 1988; McCann 1997; Goren 2005;
Jacoby 2006).

The strength of the self-interest frames varies and past studies show that the effect of
messages on attitudes depends on frame strength (Chong 2000; Chong and Druckman 2007c;
Chong and Druckman 2010; Aaroe 2011). There is no clear consensus on what exactly
constitutes a strong frame (Chong and Druckman 2007c), but past self-interest studies find the
impact of self-interest on attitudes often depends on the magnitude and certainty of a person’s
self-interest in a policy (Sears and Funk 1991; Chong et. al. 2001). The magnitude of a person’s
self-interest is the size of their expected loss/gain due to the policy. The certainty of a person’s
self-interest is how likely the expected effects are to occur. Therefore, varying the magnitude and
certainty of a policy’s impact on individuals could create differences in frame strength that
would influence the effectiveness of self-interest messages on preferences.

Four self-interest frames were developed for each policy by varying magnitude (high
versus low) and certainty (high versus low; a 2 x 2 design). In high certainty conditions, people
were told that the effects were “most likely” to happen and in the low certainty conditions,
people were told that the effects “might possibly” happen. In the high magnitude conditions, the
effects of the policy were described as “large” or “a lot” while in the low magnitude conditions
the effects of the policy were described as “small” or “a little.” Therefore, for each experiment,
there were four self-interest conditions: strong certainty and strong magnitude, strong certainty
and weak magnitude, weak certainty and strong magnitude, and weak certainty and weak
magnitude.
Each experiment also featured four different competitive frame conditions. One competing frame condition included the strongest self-interest frame (strong magnitude and strong certainty) and a competing self-interest message (the competing messages did not explicitly state a magnitude and said the effect “would” happen). A second competing frame condition included the strongest self-interest frame and a competing value message. A third competing frame condition included the weakest self-interest frame (weak magnitude and weak certainty) and a competing self-interest message. Finally, the fourth competing frame condition included the weakest self-interest frame and a competing value message. The competing self-interest and competing value messages were the same for the strong self-interest frame and the weak self-interest frame. Past research shows the strength of a frame impacts its effect in a competitive information environment (Chong and Druckman 2010), and this experimental design allowed me to test whether the strength of the frame impacted its effectiveness in a competitive environment. The four conditions also test whether self-interest messages were more effective versus either conflicting value messages or conflicting self-interest messages.

For each of the six framing questions, there are 10 conditions: (1) control (no frame); (2) value frame; four self-interest frames: (3) strong magnitude/strong certainty, (4) strong magnitude/weak certainty, (5) weak magnitude/strong certainty, (6) weak magnitude/weak certainty; four competitive frames: (7) strong self-interest versus value, (8) strong self-interest versus self-interest, (9) weak self-interest versus value, and (10) weak self-interest versus self-interest.

Each respondent participated in three framing experiments (one health care, one immigration, and one tax policy), and for each question respondents were randomly assigned to one of the ten conditions. The order of the experimental questions was randomly rotated, and the
randomization of the order and condition were independent. The randomization was set to ensure there were roughly an equal number of question order combinations and an equal number of respondents in each condition across the sample.

After completing the three experiments, respondents completed a set of demographic questions about their partisanship, political ideology age, gender, education, race, and income (See Appendix XI for all the question wordings/coding).

3. Analysis

First, I ran an ANOVA test and an ordered logistic regression for each of the six policies to determine if varying the magnitude and certainty of the self-interest frames had a significant impact on their effectiveness. Then I examined the mean levels of support for each of the six policies and ran ordered logistic regressions for respondents’ preferences to test the main effects of the self-interest frames in a standalone context. The models included a dummy variable for self-interest frames, and controlled for partisanship, age, income, education, gender, race, social ideology, fiscal ideology, and existing beliefs. I also ran ANOVAS and ordered logistic regressions for each of the six policies to determine the effects of the self-interest frames on preferences when facing competing value messages and when facing competing self-interest messages. Then, I ran logistic regressions to see if self-interest frames had any effect on respondents’ perceptions of how the policy would affect them. The models included dummy variables for self-interest frame, value frame, and competitive frame, and all of the control variables. Lastly, I calculated the difference in mean levels of policy support across conditions for respondents with different political ideologies.
4. Results

Effects of Varying Magnitude and Certainty

The results show that varying the magnitude and certainty did not lead to consistent or significant differences in the effects of the self-interest frames on either perceptions of the policy impact or preferences (see Table XVI below).

The effects of the four self-interest frames on preferences were significantly different for two of the six issues, eliminating capital gains taxes and increasing border security (see row 2 of Table XVI). For these two issues, variations in the magnitude of the frames led to differences in the effects on preferences (see row 3 of Table XVI). With eliminating capital gains, the weaker magnitude condition had more impact on preferences than the stronger condition. In contrast, the stronger magnitude condition had more effect on preferences than the weaker condition for increasing border security. The variation in magnitude did not have a significant impact of the effect of the frames for the other for issues. Likewise, the variation certainty of the frame did not have any significant impact on the effects of the self-interest frames on preferences for any of the six issues (see row 4 of Table XVI).
Table XVI: F-values for ANOVA Tests of Policy Perceptions/Preferences for Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Interest frames impact on perceived policy effect in standalone context</th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.20+</strong></td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>3.45*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.70+</strong></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>5.61*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.94+</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>3.35+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *= P<.01, *= P<.05, += P<.10

Variations in the strength of frames also did not have consistently significant effects on either preferences or perceived impact of a policy in a competitive context. The differences in strength (strong magnitude and strong certainty compared with weak magnitude and weak certainty) had a slightly significant impact on perceptions of effects for only one of six issues, single-payer health system (see row 5 of Table XVI). Likewise, the variation in strength had a slightly significant effect on preferences in only one of six issues, path to citizenship, in a competitive context (see row 6 of Table XVI). The results show strength of frames did not consistently have a strong impact on the effectiveness of the frames in a competitive context.

The ordered logistic results show that no self-interest frame was the strongest or the weakest across all six issues (Table XVII) below. For example, the hypothesized strongest frame (strong magnitude and strong certainty) had mixed effects when compared to the other frames. This frame had larger effects on preferences than the other frames for path to citizenship.
and raising the Medicare eligibility age. However, it had a smaller effect on preferences than other frames for the other four issues, and had the weakest effects on preferences for eliminating capital gains. Likewise, there were mixed results for the hypothesized weakest frame (weak certainty and weak magnitude). It had the smallest effects on preferences toward raising estate taxes, creating a single payer health system, path to citizenship, and increasing border security. However, it had the strongest effect on preferences toward eliminating capital gains.

Table XVII: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support for Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong certainty, strong magnitude</td>
<td>.44+</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.73**</td>
<td>-.51*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong certainty, weak magnitude</td>
<td>.85**</td>
<td>.43+</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.55*</td>
<td>-.62*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak certainty, strong magnitude</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>.54*</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.70**</td>
<td>-.12**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak certainty, weak magnitude</td>
<td>.95**</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.47*</td>
<td>-.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 1049  1003  1049  1004  1049  1005
Pseudo R²: .12  .13  .08  .24  .19  .13

All models control for sex, education, income, age, race, partisanship, social ideology, fiscal ideology, and existing beliefs. **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

The effects of the different strengthened frames varied across issues. All four self-interest frames had significant effects on preferences toward eliminating capital gains and a path to citizenship (see column 1 and column 5 of Table XVII). Likewise, none of the self-interest frames had significant effects on preferences toward either health care policy proposal (see column 3 and column 4 of Table XVII). Two of the four self-interest frames had a significant effect on preferences toward raising estate taxes (see column 2 of Table XVII). With increasing
border security, three of the four self-interest frames had a significant effect on preferences (see column 6 of Table XVII).

Since variations in strength did not significantly impact the effects of the messages, the four self-interest conditions were collapsed into one self-interest condition for the proceeding analyses. Combining the conditions increased the power to analyze the impacts of self-interest frames.

**Main Framing Effects of Policy Preferences**

The self-interest frames had significant effects on people’s preferences for the two tax policies and the two immigration policies; however, the self-interest frames did not have significant effects on preferences for either health care policy (see Table XVIII below).

**Table XVIII: Mean Support for Policies for Framing Study 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(106)</td>
<td>(97)</td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>(103)</td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>(99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value frame</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>(104)</td>
<td>(108)</td>
<td>(99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Interest</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frames</td>
<td>(423)</td>
<td>(409)</td>
<td>(428)</td>
<td>(403)</td>
<td>(423)</td>
<td>(407)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frames</td>
<td>(430)</td>
<td>(406)</td>
<td>(424)</td>
<td>(413)</td>
<td>(426)</td>
<td>(416)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means based on a 6-point answer scale with 1=strongly oppose and 6=strongly support.

The mean level of support for the tax policies was significantly higher for the respondents with the positive self-interest frame than the control group (see Table XVIII above). With eliminating capital gains, the control group’s average level of support was 2.70 while the average
level of support for those who received a positive self-interest frame was 3.30 (see column 1 of Table XVIII). Likewise, the self-interest group’s average support for raising estate taxes was 3.20 while the control groups average level of support of 2.61 (see column 2 of Table XVIII). When compared to the mean of the positive value frame groups, the positive self-interest frames was associated with significantly higher support for eliminating capital gains and similar levels of support for raising estate taxes.

The mean level of support for the immigration policies was significantly lower for the respondents with the negative self-interest frame than the control group. With path to citizenship, the control group’s average level of support was 4.39 while the average level of support for those who received the negative self-interest frame was 3.89 (see column 5 of Table XVIII). Likewise, the average level of support for increased border security for those who received a negative self-interest frame was 3.47 while average support among the control group was 3.99 (see column 6 of Table XVIII). When compared to the mean of the negative value frame groups, the negative self-interest messages led to substantially lower levels of support for both immigration policies.

There was little difference in the mean level of support for the two health care policies for the respondents who received the self-interest message and those in the control group. The average level of support for raising the Medicare eligibility age was 2.71 for the control group and 2.82 for the positive self-interest frame group (see column 3 of Table XVIII). With creating a single-payer health care system, the mean level of support among the control group was 3.85 compared with an average of 4.11 for the positive self-interest frame group (see column 4 of Table XVIII).
The results of the multivariate ordered logistic regression models confirm that the self-interest frames had significant effects on attitudes toward the tax and immigration policies, but not the health care policies (see Table XIX below).

Table XIX: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support with Combined Conditions for Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Interest Frames</td>
<td>.77** (.21)</td>
<td>.40+ (.21)</td>
<td>.12 (.20)</td>
<td>-.05 (.21)</td>
<td>-.61** (.20)</td>
<td>-.63** (.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Frame</td>
<td>.40 (.26)</td>
<td>.56* (.26)</td>
<td>.20 (.25)</td>
<td>.32 (.27)</td>
<td>-.26 (.25)</td>
<td>-.21 (.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>1004</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>1005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All models control for sex, education, income, age, race, partisanship, social ideology, fiscal ideology, and existing beliefs. **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

The ordered logistic regression coefficients indicate that the pro self-interest messages were associated with higher levels of support for eliminating capital gains and higher levels of support for raising estate taxes than the control group, on average, when controlling for all other factors in the model (see column 1 and column 2 of Table XIX).

The ordered logistic regression coefficients show that the negative self-interest messages were associated with lower levels of support for a path to citizenships and lower levels of support for increasing border security than the control group, on average, when controlling for all other factors in the model (see column 5 and column 6 of Table XIX).
The ordered logistic regression coefficients show the positive self-interest messages were not associated with any significant change in support for either raising the Medicare eligibility age or creating a single-payer health care system (see column 3 and column 4 of Table XIX).

**Effects of Self-Interest Frames in Competitive Context**

The results of ANOVA tests show that the type of opposing frame (value or self-interest) can impact the effect of a self-interest frame in a competitive context (see Table XX below). Self-interest frames had more significant effects on both perceptions of policy effect and policy support when paired with a competing value message rather than a competing self-interest message. The frames had more affect on perceptions of the policy effect when facing a competing value message than when facing a competing self-interest message for three of the six issues (see row 1 of Table XX). Likewise, the frames had more affect on policy support when facing a competing value message than a competing self-interest message for two of the six issues (see row 2 of Table XX).

### Table XX: F-Values for ANOVA Tests of Differences in Policy Perceptions /Preferences When Facing Opposing Value Message Compared to When Facing Opposing Self-Interest Message in Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Effect</th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy Support</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td><strong>4.82</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.43+</strong></td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td><strong>3.75+</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Support</td>
<td><strong>.00</strong></td>
<td>.16</td>
<td><strong>7.13</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.43</strong></td>
<td><strong>.05</strong></td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10**
Self-Interest frames had consistent and significant effects on preferences when facing conflicting value messages (see row 2 of Table XXI below). Positive self-interest frames were associated with increases in support for both eliminating capital gains taxes and raising estate taxes when facing a negative value message (see column 1 and column 2 Table XXI). Likewise, negative self-interest frames were associated with declines in support for path to citizenship and increasing border security when paired with positive value messages (see column 5 and column 6 of Table XXI). With creating a single-payer health care system, the positive self-interest message, which was not associated with a change in preference when presented alone, also was insignificant when presented with the negative value message (see column 4 of Table XXI).

These results indicate the effects of self-interest frames can persist when facing competing value frames.

Table XXI: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support in Competitive Conditions for Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competing with SI Frames</td>
<td>.41+ (.23)</td>
<td>.32 (.23)</td>
<td>-.15 (.22)</td>
<td>-.44+ (.23)</td>
<td>-.30 (.22)</td>
<td>-.41+ (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing with Value Frames</td>
<td>.37+ (.23)</td>
<td>.39+ (.23)</td>
<td>.40* (.22)</td>
<td>.07 (.24)</td>
<td>-.57* (.22)</td>
<td>-.70** (.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N 1049 1003 1049 1004 1049 1005
Pseudo R² .12 .13 .08 .24 .19 .13

All models control for sex, education, income, age, race, partisanship, social ideology, fiscal ideology, and existing beliefs. **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

The self-interest frames had mixed effects on preferences when facing a competing self-interest frame. The self-interest frames had significant effects on preferences toward eliminating
capital gains and increasing border security when paired with a conflicting self-interest message (see column 1 and column 6 of Table XXI). However, self-interest frames did not have significant effects on preferences when paired with a conflicting self-interest frame for raising estate taxes and path to citizenship (see column 2 and column 5 of Table XXI). These results indicate that competing self-interest frames can, in some but not all cases, mitigate the effects of self-interest frames on preferences.

The health care cases illustrate that competitive contexts can create effects on preferences that differ from the effects of self-interest frames presented alone. The positive self-interest frame had no effect on preferences toward creating a single-payer health care system, but the conflicting self-interest frames condition was associated with a decline in support (see column 4 of Table XXI). Likewise, the positive self-interest message had no effect on preferences toward raising the Medicare eligibility age when presented alone; however, when paired with the negative value message, the positive self-interest message was associated with an increase in support for raising the Medicare eligibility age (see column 3 of Table XXI). The findings show that a competitive context can both weaken and strengthen the effects of self-interest messages on preferences.

_Framing Effects on Perceptions of Policy Impact_

The results illustrate that self-interest frames significantly impacted how people believed policies would affect them personally (see Table XXII below). In three out of the four issues in which self-interest frames were associated with changes in opinion in a standalone context, self-interest frames were also associated with a change in how people believed the policy would affect them. The positive self-interest frames were associated with respondents being more likely to believe eliminating capital gains would have a positive impact on them (see column 1 of Table
Likewise, the negative self-interest frames were associated with respondents being more likely to believe a path to citizenship and increased border security would have a negative impact on them (see column 5 and column 6 of Table XXII). The positive self-interest messages for raising estate taxes, raising the Medicare eligibility age, and creating a single-payer health care system did not significantly impact people’s perceptions of the effects of the law.

The findings illustrate that changes in preferences associated with self-interest frames were often coupled to changes in how people perceived the policy would impact them. The self-interest frames were associated with changes in perceptions of the law for the three issues (eliminating capital gains taxes, path to citizenship and increase border security) that self-interest frames had the strongest association with a change in preferences. Self-interest frames had a weak association with preferences for raising estate taxes, and no significant association with perceptions of the policy effect. Likewise, the self-interest frames had no association with changes in preferences for the health care policies and no association with changes in perceptions of the law. The health care cases provided evidence that self-interest frames that did not change

Table XXII: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Effect for Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Interest frames</td>
<td>.36+ (.20)</td>
<td>.01 (.20)</td>
<td>-.15 (.20)</td>
<td>-.22 (.19)</td>
<td>-.67** (.21)</td>
<td>-.32+ (.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value frame</td>
<td>.05 (.26)</td>
<td>.24 (.26)</td>
<td>-.08 (.25)</td>
<td>-.03 (.24)</td>
<td>.07 (.27)</td>
<td>-.49* (.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>1023</td>
<td>1049</td>
<td>1023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All models control for sex, education, income, age, race, partisanship, social ideology, fiscal ideology, and existing beliefs. **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10
perceptions of a policy’s impact were likely not to be associated with changes in preferences. The six framing experiments show changes in beliefs about a policy’s effects were associated with changes in policy preferences.

*Differences in Framing Effects and Respondent Ideology*

The self-interest frames had different effects on the preferences of respondents with different political ideologies (see Table XXIII below). In particular, the self-interest messages had a more consistently significant impact on the preferences of moderates than self-identified political liberals or conservatives. The self-interest messages had a significant impact on the attitudes of moderates for five of the six policies, all except raising the Medicare eligibility age (see row 5 of Table XXIII). In contrast, self-interest frames had a significant impact on the preferences of liberals for three issues (raise estate taxes, path to citizenship and increase border security) and a significant impact on conservatives for one issue (increase border security) (see row 4 and row 6 of Table XXIII). However, the small number of self-identified conservatives in the sample limited the power to analyze the effects of self-interest frames on this group.
Table XXIII: Mean Support for Policies by Respondent Ideology for Framing Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eliminate capital gains taxes</th>
<th>Raise estate taxes</th>
<th>Raise Medicare eligibility age</th>
<th>Create a single-payer health system</th>
<th>Path to citizenship</th>
<th>Increase border security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>5.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td>(49)</td>
<td>(43)</td>
<td>(47)</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>(46)</td>
<td>(56)</td>
<td>(58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Interest Groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>4.76*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(71)</td>
<td>(66)</td>
<td>(44)</td>
<td>(45)</td>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>(46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td><strong>3.36</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.96</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.95</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.61</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.65</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.93</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(209)</td>
<td>(195)</td>
<td>(168)</td>
<td>(143)</td>
<td>(155)</td>
<td>(141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td><strong>3.92</strong></td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td><strong>4.42</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.92</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(140)</td>
<td>(147)</td>
<td>(210)</td>
<td>(213)</td>
<td>(214)</td>
<td>(216)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test results: **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10, ++=P<.10 single-tail
Fiscal ideology is used for the tax issues, and social ideology is used for health care and immigration issues. Liberals are those who identified as “extremely liberal” or “somewhat liberal.” Moderates are those who identified as “slightly liberal,” “moderate,” or “slightly conservative.” Conservatives are those who identified as “extremely conservative” or “somewhat conservative.

The effects of self-interest frames on those with different ideologies varied across issue.

With eliminating capital gains, the positive self-interest frames were associated with a significant increase in support for only those who identified as fiscally moderate (see column 1 of Table XXIII). With raising estate taxes, the positive self-interest frames were associated with a significant increase in support among fiscal moderates and liberals (see column 2 of Table XXIII). The positive self-interest frame for raising the Medicare eligibility age was associated with a much larger increase in support among social conservatives than either liberals or moderates, but the increase was not significant (see column 3 of Table XXIII). With creating a single-payer health system, the positive self-interest messages were associated with a slightly significant increase in support only among social moderates (see column 4 of Table XXIII). As for immigration, the negative self-interest frames were associated with significant declines in support among social liberals, conservatives, and moderates.
The differences in the impact of self-interest frames on preferences across ideological groups illustrate how various issues impact the effectiveness of self-interest messages. Liberals and conservatives took opposing positions on three issues (based on the mean score of the control group): eliminating capital gains taxes, single-payer health system, and a path to citizenship. In all three cases, self-interest frames were associated with the largest changes in opinion among moderates. These results provide evidence that in highly political issues, self-interest messages have the most impact on moderates. In contrast, all three ideological groups expressed opposition to raising estate taxes. However, the self-interest frames were associated with the largest increase in support among liberals, who had the least initial opposition to the policy. In this case, self-interest frames appealed more to people with more moderate attitudes.

Despite the more consistently significant effects of frames on political moderates, there were not significant differences in effects among ideological groups for any of the six issues. The interaction term between the self-interest frames and being moderated was insignificant in all six models. The insignificance is likely due to the fact that while the self-interest messages often had the largest effect on moderates, the messages also usually had effects on both conservative and liberals.

5. Discussion

The results from Study 2 provide additional evidence that self-interest frames can impact people’s preferences in both standalone and competitive contexts across issues. The findings also further demonstrate that respondents’ political ideology can impact the effectiveness of self-interest frames.

The findings in Study 2 also provide additional insights into the effects of self-interest
frames on preferences. The results showed that changes in preferences associated with self-interest frames were also associated with changes in people’s perceptions of how the law would impact them personally. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that varying the magnitude and certainty of policy effects on respondents did not significantly impact the effectiveness of self-interest frames.

The self-interest frames were associated with significant changes in policy preferences for both tax policies and both immigration policies. The findings provide support for Hypothesis 1 and show that self-interest frames can impact the preferences. The effects of self-interest frames on preferences were larger than the effects of the value frame for eliminating capital gains, path to citizenship and increased border security, and the self-interest effects were comparable with value effects for increasing estate taxes.

The effects of competing self-interest frames on preferences were often significant as the impact of self-interest messages persisted when facing conflicting messages. The results are contrary to Hypothesis 2, but consistent with the findings in Study 1. In five out of six cases, the effects of self-interest frames on preferences were significant when paired with a competing value message. These findings are consistent with studies showing that concrete messages (i.e. self-interest frame) are more persuasive than abstract messages (i.e. value frame) when a decision is imminent (Fujita et al. 2008; Kim et al 2009). However, when facing a conflicting self-interest message, the impact of the self-interest messages on preference remained significant in only two cases. The results show that the effects of self-interest messages can persist, and the durability of the effects may vary based on the type of conflicting message.

The effects of self-interest frames also varied based on respondents’ political ideology. The findings provide more support for Hypothesis 3 as the self-interest frames tended to have
more consistently significant effects on self-identified political moderates than self-identified liberals of conservatives.

Study 2 illustrates that changes in preferences due to self-interest frames were linked to changes in perceptions of the policy effects. When self-interest frames were associated with changes in preferences, the frames were also associated with changes in people’s perception of how the policies would impact them in three out of four cases. Likewise, when self-interest frames were not associated with changes in perceived effect, they also were usually not associated with changes in preferences.

The results of Study 2 did not provide any evidence that varying the magnitude and certainty of the policy effect on respondents had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the self-interest frames. The insignificant differences could be due to the fact that for magnitude and certainty of both weak and strong frames tended to be associated with significant changes in preferences. The size of the effect or the likelihood of the effect did not seem to matter as much as the effect itself.

Limitations

The experimental design and sample size limited the ability to test whether variations in the strength of self-interest frames had an impact on the frames’ effects on preferences. With a six-point attitude scale and average changes in preferences that were often less than 1-point in magnitude, it was very difficult to detect significant differences in the effects with the limited sample size.

Both Study 1 and Study 2 illustrate the challenge of designing and testing self-interest messages across a heterogeneous sample. The results of Study 2 showed that when self-interest frames were associated with changes in perceptions about the effects of the law on respondents,
the messages were also associated with changes in preferences. However, the self-interest frames did not always change respondents’ perceptions of how a law would impact them personally. The failure of self-interest frames to resonate with some respondents was likely due in part to respondents’ personal circumstances and beliefs. Differences in income likely impact people’s beliefs about how certain tax policies will help or hurt them. Likewise, differences in people’s interaction with immigrants likely effects how they believe certain immigration proposals will impact them. These individual differences in situations weaken the effectiveness of self-interest frames in the experimental design.

G. Framing Study 3

This study featured self-interest messages targeted to certain sub-segments of the sample in order to address a limitation of the first two studies. The self-interest messages in the first two studies were designed to appeal to all respondents, regardless of their personal circumstances or situations, and these individual differences in income, health/insurance status or relations with immigrants may have reduced the effectiveness of the self-interest frames. With Study 3, respondents received pro and/or con frames tailored to relevant personal variables.

1. Respondents and Procedures

The data is based on a survey conducted via the Amazon Mechanical Turk web site from May 14, 2014 to May 21, 2014. The survey received 1,672 responses (1,634 fully completed). The only eligibility requirements for respondents were that they were 18 years old and living in the United States. Respondents received 25 cents for completing the survey, which took respondents about three and a half minutes, on average, to complete. There was a question right
before the demographic section designed to check whether respondents were reading the questions (it instructed respondents what answer choice to select), and 95 percent of respondents answered it correctly. As with Study 2, this survey sample is younger, whiter, more male, and more liberal than the general population (see Appendix XIV). However, as discussed earlier, research shows Mechanical Turk can provide a valid sample for framing experiments despite the fact the sample is not representative of the population (Leeper and Mullinix 2014).

**Targeted/Tailored Messages**

The framing literature has not focused on political messages tailored to respondents; however, there is evidence from both within political science and other disciplines that customizing messages can increase their effectiveness. For example, studies show political campaigns are starting to use more targeted communication (Hillygus and Shields 2008), and messages tailored toward particular individuals can increase voter turnout (Green and Gerber 2004).

There is extensive marketing, health communication and psychological research illustrating the impacts of tailoring, customizing, personalizing or targeting communication. Matching a message to the motivations, self-concept or personality traits of respondents impact its persuasiveness (e.g., Cacioppo 1982; Clary et al. 1998; Petty et al. 2000; Wheeler et al. 2005). Tailoring e-mail or online marketing messages based on information from surveys, consumer transactions or other sources increase their effectiveness with customers (Ansari and Mela 2003; Tam and Ho 2005; Kalyanaraman and Sundar 2006; Yu and Cude 2009). Public health communication targeted toward certain people is more successful in changing people’s attitudes or behavior than non-tailored messages (Kreuter et al. 1999; Rimer and Kreuter 2006; Noar et al. 2007).
2. Framing Experiment Design

The self-interest frames in Study 3 were tailored to respondents’ personal circumstances. In particular, the frames varied based on respondents reported income (for tax proposal), age (for health care proposal), and whether they are paying or will soon be paying for college for themselves or a family member (for proposal regarding college financial aid for immigrants).

For each of the three policy proposals, respondents were divided into two groups based on their answers to demographic questions, and respondents received self-interest frames tailored to their characteristics. The three policy proposals were designed to impose a tangible cost on one group of respondents, which should have made those respondents, on average, less likely to support the policy. In contrast, the other group did not have as clear a material stake in the issue.

For taxes, respondents were split based on whether they made more or less than $50,000, and the proposal was to raise taxes on only those people with incomes over $50,000. For health care, respondents were divided based on whether or not they are under 29 years old, and the proposal was to reduce future Medicare benefits for people under 29. For immigration, respondents were split based on whether they were currently or plan to soon be paying for college for themselves or a family member, and the proposal was to offer financial aid to help immigrant children brought to the US illegally to pay for college.

The cut points for these three issues were selected based on the sample demographics from the Study 2 surveys and were designed to split the sample into two roughly equal sized groups. With taxes, the $50,000 income level was used because the median income for respondents in the Study 2 surveys conducted via Amazon Mechanical Turk was around $50,000. Likewise, the age of 28 for Medicare reductions was chosen because the median age for
respondents in the Study 2 surveys was about 28 years old. Paying for college was selected as a cut point for immigration because there were a significant number of college-aged respondents who said they had completed some college in the Study 2 surveys, which indicated a sizeable portion of the Amazon Mechanical Turk sample was likely to be paying for college.

For each of the two groups for every issue, there were four experimental conditions: control (no frame), positive self-interest frame, negative self-interest frame, and competing frame (both positive and negative self-interest frames). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, and the order of the three policy proposals was rotated across respondents. The order and condition were randomized independently, and the randomization was designed to produce roughly equal numbers of conditions and roughly equal numbers of orders.

As with the previous studies, the self-interest frames and policies were chosen based on an analysis of in-depth interviews and feedback from interview participants (see Appendix XII for details). All of the self-interest frames highlighted material benefits/costs for respondents such as higher/lower taxes, more/less Medicare benefits, and more college diversity/less available funding.

The survey also featured a manipulation check and standard demographic questions. In order to measure how the frames impacted respondents’ perceptions of the policy effects, respondents were asked how the policy would affect them. The manipulation check question was asked after each framing question. The survey also featured questions about gender, race, education, political ideology, partisanship, and prior beliefs. All of the question wordings are available in Appendix XIII.
3. **Analysis**

First, I calculated the mean level of support for each of the six groups (two groups for each of three policy proposals) for the four framing conditions (control, pro, con and competing). Then I ran six ordered logistic regression models to test the effects of the self-interest frames on preferences. The models included dummy variables for receiving positive, negative or competing frames, and controlled for gender, age, income, education, race, ideology, partisanship and past beliefs. Next, I combined the two groups and ran three ordered logistic regression models (one for each policy). The models included all the control variables as well as interaction terms (group times frame) designed to measure whether each frame was more or less effective for one group or the other. Then, I ran ordered logistic regressions to measure the effects of the self-interest frames on respondents’ perception of how the policies would affect them. The six models (one for each of the two demographic groups for each of the three issues) included dummy variables for receiving positive, negative, or competing frames, and controls for gender, age, income, education, race, ideology, partisanship and prior beliefs. Lastly, I ran logistic regressions to test whether respondents’ political ideology moderated the effects of self-interest frames on preferences. The regression models included interaction terms between being politically moderate and the self-interest frame received, and controls for gender, age, income, education, race, partisanship and past beliefs.
4. Results

Effects of Self-Interest Frames on Respondents with Objective Opposition

The results show that self-interest frames were associated with both increases and decreases in support among people with an objective interest in opposing the proposals (see Table XXIV below).

Table XXIV: Mean Support for Policies for Those with Objective Interest in Framing Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tax increase, those over $50,000</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, those under 29</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, those paying for college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control (no frame)</td>
<td>2.53 (175)</td>
<td>2.38 (208)</td>
<td>3.25 (238)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>2.88 (168)</td>
<td>3.21 (200)</td>
<td>3.18 (234)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>2.33 (169)</td>
<td>2.46 (199)</td>
<td>2.75 (227)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means based on a 6-point answer scale with 1=strongly oppose and 6=strongly support.

Among people making over $50,000 a year, the mean level of support increased from 2.53 (control group) to 2.88 with the positive self-interest frame (see column 1 of Table XXIV). With the negative self-interest frame, the mean level of support decreased from 2.53 (control group) to 2.33 for the self-interest group.

For those younger than 29 years old, the mean level of support increased from 2.38 (control group) to 3.21 with the positive self-interest frame (see column 2 of Table XXIV). With the negative self-interest frame, there was little difference between the control group’s mean level of support (2.38) and the mean of the group who received the negative self-interest frame (2.46).
Among people paying/soon paying for college, there was little difference between the mean level of support for the control group (3.25) and the group who received positive self-interest frame group (3.18; see row 3 of Table XXIV). However the mean level of support decreased from 3.25 (control group) to 2.75 with the negative self-interest message.

With the multivariate ordered logistic regression models, the positive self-interest frames were associated with significant increases in support in two cases, and the negative self-interest frames were associated with significant decreases in support in two cases (see Table XXV below).

**Table XXV: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support for Those with Objective Interest in Framing Study 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tax increase, those over $50,000</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, those under 29</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, those paying for college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>.34* (.20)</td>
<td>1.05** (.18)</td>
<td>.01 (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>-.42* (.20)</td>
<td>.25 (.18)</td>
<td>-.39* (.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlling for gender, age, income, education, race, ideology, partisanship and past beliefs.
**=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

Among people making over $50,000 a year, the positive self-interest frame was associated with a significant increase in support (coefficient .34, p<.1; see column 1 of Table XXV). The negative self-interest frame was associated with a significant decrease in support for the tax proposal (coefficient -.42, p<.05; see column 1 of Table XXV).

For those younger than 29 years old, the positive self-interest frame was associated with a significant increase in support for reducing Medicare benefits for people younger than 29 years
old (coefficient 1.05, p<.01; see column 2 of Table XXV). However, the negative self-interest frame did not have a significant effect on preferences (coefficient .25, ns; see column 2 of Table XXV).

Among people paying/soon paying for college, the positive self-interest frame was not associated with a significant change in preferences toward college financial aid for illegal immigrants (coefficient .01, ns; see column 3 of Table XXV). In contrast, the negative self-interest message was associated with a significant decrease in support for college financial aid for illegal immigrants among people paying for college/soon paying for college (coefficient -.39, ns; see column 3 Table XXV).

The results illustrate that self-interest frames both reinforced negative attitudes (tax increases and financial aid) and boosted support (tax increases and Medicare cuts) for proposals in which respondents had an objective interest in opposing.

**Effects of Self-Interest Frames on Respondents Without Clear Objective Stake**

The results show that positive self-interest frames were associated with increases in support among people without clear objective interests in the issues, but the negative self-interest frames were not associated with decreases in support (see Table XXVI below).

---

**Table XXVI: Mean Support for Policies for Those without Objective Interest in Framing Study 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tax increase, those under $50,000</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, those over 28</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, those not pay for college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control (no frame)</td>
<td>3.62 (241)</td>
<td>2.66 (207)</td>
<td>2.92 (178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>3.73 (23)</td>
<td>3.08 (198)</td>
<td>3.21 (174)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>3.57 (225)</td>
<td>2.50 (202)</td>
<td>2.96 (170)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means based on a 6-point answer scale with 1=strongly oppose and 6=strongly support.
Among people making under $50,000, there was little difference in the average level of support for tax increases among the control group (3.62) and either the positive self-interest group (3.73) or the negative self-interest frame group (3.57; see column 1 of Table XXVI).

With Medicare reductions, the mean level of support increased from 2.66 (control group) to 3.08 with the positive self-interest frame (see column 2 of Table XXVI). In contrast, there was little difference between the control group mean level of support (2.66) and the mean of the negative self-interest frame group (2.50).

In terms of aid to immigrants, the mean level of support for those not paying for college increased from 2.92 (control group) to 3.21 with the positive self-interest frame (see column 3 of Table XXVI). On the other hand, the mean level of support for the negative self-interest group (2.96) was very similar to the control group (2.92).

With the multivariate ordered logistic regressions, the positive self-interest frame was associated with increases in support among those without a clear interest in two of the three cases (Medicare cuts and financial aid for illegal immigrants; see Table XXVII below). In contrast, none of the three negative self-interest frames was associated with a change in preference among those without a clear objective stake in the issue.
Table XXVII: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support for Those without Objective Interest in Framing Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tax increase, those under $50,000</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, those over 28</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, those not pay for college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>.13 ( .17)</td>
<td>.72** ( .18)</td>
<td>.48* ( .20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con Self-Interest Frame</td>
<td>.10 (.17)</td>
<td>-.07 (.18)</td>
<td>-.08 (.20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 954 819 706  
Pseudo R²: .17 .09 .18

Controlling for gender, age, income, education, race, ideology, partisanship and past beliefs.  
**=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

Among people making under $50,000, neither the positive nor the negative self-interest frame was associated with any significant change in preference toward a proposed increase in taxes on people making over $50,000 (see column 1 of Table XXVII).

For people over 28 years old, the positive self-interest frame was associated with a significant increase in support for reducing Medicare benefits for people under 29 years old (coefficient .72, p<.01; see column 2 of Table XXVII). The negative self-interest frame was not associated with any significant change in preferences toward reducing Medicare benefits.

Among people not paying for college, the positive self-interest message was associated with an increase in support for college financial aid to illegal immigrants (coefficient .48, p<.05; see column 3 of Table XXVII). In contrast, the negative self-interest frame had no significant change on preferences toward college financial aid for illegal immigrants.

The results show that positive self-interest frames can be associated with increases in support among people without a clear stake in an issue. In contrast, the experiments did not provide any evidence that negative self-interest frames can be associated with decreases in support among people without an objective interest in a policy.

Differences in Effects Among Respondents With and Without Clear Objective Stake
The results show four of the six frames had more significant effects on the preferences of respondents with clear objective interest, and one frame had more significant effects on the preferences of respondents without clear objective stakes (see Table XXVIII below).

Table XXVIII: Ordered Logistic Regression Coefficients for Policy Support with Interaction Term for Interest in Framing Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tax increase, objective=those over $50,000</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, objective=those under 28</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, objective=those pay for college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (objective group*pro frame)</td>
<td>.40+ (0.22)</td>
<td>.39+ (0.22)</td>
<td>-.44+ (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (objective group*con frame)</td>
<td>-.41+ (0.22)</td>
<td>.23 (0.21)</td>
<td>-.50+ (0.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1,646</td>
<td>1,646</td>
<td>1.646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Controlling for gender, age, income, education, race, ideology, partisanship and past beliefs. *=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10

With tax increases, both the positive and negative frames had more significant effects on preferences of people with an objective interest (i.e. those with incomes over $50,000). The pro frame was associated with a more significant increase in support among people making over $50,000 than those with lower incomes (interaction coefficient .40, p<.10; See row 1 of Table XXVIII). Likewise, the con frame was associated with a more significant decrease in support among people making over $50,000 than those with lower incomes (interaction coefficient -.41, p<.10; See row 2 of Table XXVIII).

With Medicare reductions, the pro frame was associated with a more significant increase in support among those with an objective interest (under 29 years old) than those without an objective interest (interaction coefficient .39, p<.10; See row 1 of Table XXVIII). The con frame
did not have a significant difference in affect among those with and without objective interest (interaction coefficient .23, p<.21).

With aid to immigrants, the pro frame had more significant effects on preferences for those without an objective interest (not paying for college) and the con frame had more significant effects on those with an objective interest (paying for college). The pro self-interest frame was associated with more increase in support among those not paying for college (interaction coefficient -.44, p<.10; See row 1 of Table XXVIII). In contrast, the con self-interest frame was associated with more decrease in support among those paying for college (interaction coefficient -.50, p<.10; See row 2 of Table XXVIII.)

Effects of Self-Interest Frames in Competitive Context

In competitive contexts, the effects of self-interest frames on preferences remained significant in some cases and were mitigated in other cases. For three cases, the significant effects of self-interest frames effects on preferences in a stand-alone context remained significant in the competitive context; however, the significant effects of self-interest frame on preferences in a stand-alone context were mitigated in a competitive context in three other cases (see Table XXIX below).
Positive self-interest messages that had significant effects in a standalone context remained significant in a competitive context for three cases. In all three of these cases, the positive self-interest messages were associated with increases in support in the standalone context and the negative self-interest messages were not associated with any changes in preferences in the standalone context. The competing frames were associated with significant increases in support for Medicare reductions among people under 29 (coefficient .73, p<.01; column 3 of Table XXIX), Medicare reductions among people over 28 (coefficient .64, p<.01; column four of Table XXIX), and financial aid for illegal immigrant among people not paying for college (coefficient .35, p<.10; column 6 of Table XXIX).

The competing condition had no significant effect on preferences for either of the two tax-increase proposal groups. For people making more than $50,000, the significant effects of both the positive and negative self-interest frames in the standalone context were offset in the competitive context (coefficient .08, ns; see column 1 of Table XXIX). For people making under $50,000, the competing condition had no significant impact on preferences as neither the positive
nor negative self-interest frames had significant effects in a standalone context (coefficient .10, ns; see column 2 of Table XXIX).

The competing condition for college financial aid for illegal immigrants among people paying for college had not significant effect on preferences despite the fact the negative self-interest frame was associated with a decrease in support in the standalone context (coefficient .12, ns; see column 5 of Table XXIX).

Effects of Self-Interest Frames on Perceptions of Policy Effects

The results show that the relationships among the self-interest frames, preferences and perceived policy effects varied across issues (see Table XXX). There were cases in which self-interest frames were associated with changes in both preferences and perceived impact, cases in which self-interest frames were associated with changes in preferences but not perceived impact, and cases in which self-interest frames were associated with changes in perceived impact but not preferences.

There were three cases in which the self-interest frames were associated with significant changes in both preferences and respondents’ perceptions of how the policy would impact them. In addition to impacting preferences, the self-interest frames were associated with significant changes in perceptions for the pro Medicare under 29 group (coefficient .75, p<.01; see column 3 of Table XXX), the competing Medicare under 29 group (coefficient .63, p<.01; see column 3 of Table XXX), and the con immigration paying for college group (coefficient -.75, p<.01; see column 5 of Table XXX). For these three cases, the changes in preferences appeared to be associated with changes in respondents’ perceptions of how the policy would impact them.
There were six cases in which self-interest frames were associated with significant changes in preferences, but not significant changes in respondent’s perceptions of how the policy will impact them. For the following cases, the self-interest frames were associated with changes in preferences but not perceptions: pro frame for tax increase over $50,000 group (coefficient .15, ns; see column 2 of Table XXX), con frame of tax increase over $50,000 group (coefficient -.19, ns; see column 2 of Table XXX), pro frame for Medicare reductions over 28 group (coefficient -.17, ns; see column 4 of Table XXX, compete frame for Medicare reductions over 28 group (coefficient -.28, ns; see column 4 of Table XXX), pro frame for immigrant aid no pay for college group (coefficient -.05, ns; see column 6 of Table XXX), and compete frame for immigration aid no pay group (coefficient -.22, ns; see column 6 of Table XXX). For each of these cases, respondents did not have a clear objective stake in the issues.

There were four cases in which self-interest frames were associated with changes in perceptions of the policy impact but not with changes to preferences. Despite having no effect on preferences, self-interest frames were associated with changes in perceptions of policy effects for
the following cases: con frame for tax increase under $50,000 group (coefficient -.34, p<.10; see column 2 of Table XXX), con frame for Medicare reductions for over 28 group (coefficient -.36, p<.10; see column 4 of Table XXX), compete frame for immigrant aid pay for college group (coefficient -.48, p<.01 see column 5 of Table XXX), and con frame for immigrant aid no pay for college group (coefficient -.52, p<.01; see column 6 of Table XXX).

Ideology Moderating Effects of Self-Interest Frames

The self-interest messages were associated with more significant changes in preferences among political moderates than political ideologues in three of the twelve cases. The interaction term between political moderates and the self-interest frames was significant with the positive frame for tax increase among those under $50,000 group (coefficient .37, p<.1), the positive frame for Medicare reductions for those under 29 group (coefficient .51, p<.1), and the positive frame for immigrant aid for those not paying for college group (coefficient .57, p<.1). In all three of these cases, the self-interest frames had more significant effects on the preferences of those who identified as politically moderate than those who identified as politically liberal or conservative. However, for the majority of the cases, there was no significant difference in the effects of the frames on preferences of respondents’ of different ideologies.

The self-interest frames also had more consistently significant effects among moderates than among either liberals or conservatives (see Table XXXI below). Among moderates, the self-interest frames had significant effects for three of the positive frames and one of the negative frames (see row 7 of Table XXXI). In contrast, there were no significant effects among conservatives, and significant effects for two positive frames and one negative frame among liberals.
Table XXXI: Mean Support for Policies by Respondent Ideology for Framing Study 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tax increase, those over $50,000</th>
<th>Tax increase, those under $50,000</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, those under 29</th>
<th>Medicare reductions, those over 28</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, those paying for college</th>
<th>Aid to immigrants, those not paying for college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>1.74 (38)</td>
<td>2.15 (34)</td>
<td>2.70 (37)</td>
<td>3.43 (49)</td>
<td>2.05 (40)</td>
<td>1.93 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
<td>2.68 (94)</td>
<td>3.50 (107)</td>
<td>2.51 (111)</td>
<td>2.56 (89)</td>
<td>3.10 (124)</td>
<td>2.61 (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>2.90 (42)</td>
<td>4.25 (100)</td>
<td>1.92 (59)</td>
<td>2.21 (67)</td>
<td>4.22 (71)</td>
<td>4.03 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro-Self-Interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2.00 (47)</td>
<td>2.33 (33)</td>
<td>3.26 (35)</td>
<td>3.73 (40)</td>
<td>2.51 (49)</td>
<td>1.85 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2.95 (79)</td>
<td>3.65 (118)</td>
<td>3.29** (114)</td>
<td>3.26** (93)</td>
<td>3.07 (120)</td>
<td>3.17* (93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>3.61+ (44)</td>
<td>4.19 (90)</td>
<td>2.91** (58)</td>
<td>2.44 (72)</td>
<td>3.77 (69)</td>
<td>4.42 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Con Self-Interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>1.44 (45)</td>
<td>2.51 (39)</td>
<td>2.85 (34)</td>
<td>3.14 (37)</td>
<td>1.84 (43)</td>
<td>1.48 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
<td>2.46 (83)</td>
<td>3.46 (123)</td>
<td>2.68 (106)</td>
<td>2.62 (95)</td>
<td>2.71+ (106)</td>
<td>2.80 (76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>3.13 (48)</td>
<td>4.40 (72)</td>
<td>2.09 (68)</td>
<td>2.09 (76)</td>
<td>3.36** (86)</td>
<td>3.94 (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competing Self-Interest</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>1.57 (37)</td>
<td>2.58 (36)</td>
<td>3.64** (36)</td>
<td>3.32 (41)</td>
<td>2.70 (30)</td>
<td>1.88 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderates</td>
<td>2.79 (86)</td>
<td>3.47 (120)</td>
<td>2.69 (108)</td>
<td>3.11** (94)</td>
<td>3.00 (132)</td>
<td>2.84 (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>3.29 (51)</td>
<td>4.22 (82)</td>
<td>2.75** (61)</td>
<td>2.75* (68)</td>
<td>3.79 (72)</td>
<td>4.48 (60)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T-test results: **=P<.01, *=P<.05, +=P<.10
Liberals are those who identified as “extremely liberal” or “somewhat liberal.” Moderates are those who identified as “slightly liberal,” “moderate,” or “slightly conservative.” Conservatives are those who identified as “extremely conservative” or “somewhat conservative.

5. **Discussion**

As with the first two studies, the findings from Study 3 show that self-interest frames can impact preferences in both standalone and competitive contexts across a variety of issues. In particular, the results illustrate that self-interest frames had more consistently significant effects
on the attitudes of respondents with an objective interest than those without such an interest. Likewise, the results confirm that respondents’ political ideology can moderate the effects of self-interest frames. Study 3 also demonstrated that the relationship between self-interest frames, preferences and perceptions of policy impact could vary across issues. Lastly, the results did not provide strong evidence that self-interest frames tailored to respondents’ had more consistently significant effects on preferences than non-tailored self-interest frames in the prior two studies.

Self-interest frames were associated with significant changes in preferences for six of the twelve groups in the standalone context, including in four of six conditions featuring respondents with an objective interest. The results provide support for Hypothesis 1 and demonstrate the self-interest frames can be associated with both increases and decreases for various policy proposals.

The competing self-interest frame condition was associated with significant changes in preferences in three of six cases. The significant effects of these competing conditions were contrary to Hypothesis 2, but consistent with the results from the first two studies. The significant effects of positive self-interest messages remained despite being paired with negative self-interest messages in three cases. However, significant effects of self-interest messages in standalone contexts were mitigated when facing a competing message in two other cases. The results demonstrate that the impacts of self-interest messages can persist or be mitigated in the face of competition depending on the messages.

Respondents’ political ideology moderated the effects of self-interest frames in three cases. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 3 and show that self-interest frames can be more effective with those who identify as politically moderate than those who identify as liberal or conservative.

Study 3 showed that the relationship between self-interest frames, preferences, and
perceptions of policy impact can vary across issues. In three cases, self-interest frames were associated with changes in preferences and were also associated with changes in perceptions about the policy impact. However, in other cases self-interest frames were associated with a change in preferences but not perceptions, or vice versa. The results indicate that there is a connection between preferences and perceptions for some, but not all issues.

The tailored self-interest frames in Study 3 were not more consistently associated with significant changes in preferences than the non-tailored frames of Study 1 and Study 2. In the third study, the self-interest messages tailored to respondents were associated with significant changes in preferences for six of the twelve groups in the standalone context. The self-interest messages had significant effects on the preferences of people with an objective interest in opposing a policy and people without as clear of interests in an issue. Likewise, self-interest frames were associated with shifts in preferences that both strengthened attitudes (i.e. made negative attitudes more negative from some groups) and weakened attitudes (i.e. made negative attitudes more positive for some groups). These results illustrate that factors besides people’s objective interests (i.e. income level or age) impact the effectiveness of self-interest messages.

Limitations

The self-interest frames in Study 3 are tailored to respondents based on their objective interests (i.e. age, income, college payment situation). However, research shows that people’s perceptions of self-interest, their subjective self-interest, can often differ from their objective self-interest (see Chapters 2 and Chapters 3). People with the same income may interpret the effects of tax policies on themselves differently, and these differences in subjective self-interest could mitigate the effectiveness of tailoring messages to respondents based on objective measures of self-interest.
H. Conclusion

The findings from this research illustrate the need to reconsider the impact of self-interest on public opinion and further explore how self-interest frames influence preferences. The results clearly show that policy arguments evoking self-interest can affect people’s attitudes about a range of different issues. Past studies dismissing self-interest do not account for the framing of self-interest. However, the media and politicians often frame policies in terms of how they will impact individuals, and this research shows that such frames can influence individuals’ preferences.

Self-interest frames were tested across eighteen different issues in the three studies, and the frames were associated with significant changes in preferences in more than half the cases. Positive self-interest frames were associated with increases in support in some cases while negative self-interest messages were associated with decreases in support in other cases. The self-interest frames also had significant effects on attitudes toward all three of the policy areas (taxes, health care, and immigration). In addition, the results clearly show that the significant effects of self-interest frames can persist despite conflicting messages. The effects of self-interest message are not easily mitigated, and can impact preferences even when people receive multiple messages about a policy. The consistent and significant effects of self-interest frames on preferences in standalone and competitive contexts demonstrate that campaign/media messages appealing to people’s personal interest could impact their political attitudes.

Self-interest frames did not have significant effects on preferences in all cases, and more research is needed to understand the conditions that lead self-interest frames to have more or less impact on attitudes. Frames with more concrete appeals (e.g. lower taxes) and frames with more
subjective appeals (e.g. better health care) both had mixed results. Varying the magnitude and certainty of the policy impact did not significantly change the effectiveness of the frames in Study 2. Likewise, messages tailored to respondents did not have more consistently significant effects on preferences in Study 3 than non-tailored self-interest frames in the first two studies. However, there appears to be a connection between the effects of self-interest frames on preferences and the influence of such frames on perceptions about policy impact. At the same time, the relationship between frames, preferences and perceptions about policy impact varies across issues and more research is needed to understand how changes in beliefs about a policy are connected to changes in preferences.

The studies also indicate that the effectiveness of frames depends on individual respondent characteristics. Study 3 showed self-interest messages had more consistently significant effects on the attitudes of respondents with a direct interest in an issue compared to those without a clear interest in the issue. Likewise, all the experiments show that political ideology can moderate the effects of self-interest frames, which demonstrates that political values likely influence the impact of self-interest frames. Taxes, health care and immigration are highly political topics and many respondents may have already had strong beliefs about the policy proposals. Many framing studies focus on less salient issues (i.e. hate speech rallies) and the effects of self-interest frames in this research may be underestimated due to highly political nature of the issues.

Self-interest frames can influence people’s preferences, and there are many opportunities to further explore what factors impact the effects of self-interest messages on political attitudes. Future studies could see if self-interest frames are more effective with less salient or novel issues. Likewise, future studies could systematically study if there are differences in effects
based on whether self-interest messages appeal to the respondent, their family, or their entire community. This research tested self-interest messages alone and in competition with other messages, and future studies could see if the effects of self-interest messages are increased or decreased when paired with a complimentary value message. People receive information from a variety of different sources, and future experiments could see how manipulating the source of self-interest messages impacts their effectiveness.
V. CONCLUSION

A. Summary of Findings

The three different methodological approaches provide several important findings about how self-interest influences people’s policy preferences. The in-depth interviews illustrate that people hold beliefs about how policies will affect them, and these beliefs influence their preferences. People’s perceptions of their self-interest often differ from their individual short-term material interest because they construe their interest more broadly. People often include their friends, family or community in their self-interest, and they consider both material and nonmaterial benefits in the short and long term. Understanding these conceptions of interest is important because subjective self-interest is often highly related to policy preferences and plays a key role in decision-making. However, people do not identify a personal interest in every policy, which provides some evidence that subjective self-interest is not merely a rationalization for their preferences.

The three survey analysis studies highlight the direct and indirect effects of self-interest across a variety of issues. The findings show that both objective and subjective self-interest can directly influence preferences when controlling for factors such as partisanship, ideology and racial tolerance. At the same time, the effects of self-interest and political values on preferences are not independent as many past studies assumed. Subjective self-interest can mediate the effects of partisanship, ideology or racial tolerance on political attitudes while objective self-interest can moderate the effects of these political factors. For example, partisanship had more impact on attitudes of people not directly affected by the Affordable Care Act than those who were directly impacted by the law. In contrast, racial tolerance had more impact on people
involved with immigration than those not directly involved with it. These examples illustrate the nature of the indirect effects of self-interest can vary across issues, and highlight the significance of both the direct and indirect effects of self-interest on preferences. Although not the focus of this dissertation, these results also suggest that values such as ideology or partisanship may be different from racial tolerance.

The survey framing experiments show messages appealing to people’s self-interest can influence their political preferences. In all three studies, some self-interest frames, but not all, were associated with significant changes in attitudes. Frames appealing to more concrete benefits (e.g. lower taxes) and frames appealing to more subjective benefits (e.g. better roads or parks in the community) influenced preferences. Neither varying the magnitude or certainty of the benefits/costs nor targeting messages to individuals based on demographic characteristics dramatically increased the effectiveness of frames. However, self-interest frames that led to changes in how people perceived a policy would affect them often also changed their preferences. In addition, the self-interest messages were more consistently effective in changing attitudes of political moderates and people with a direct stake in an issue. Lastly, the significant effects of frames often endured when facing opposing value or self-interest messages in a competitive context. Collectively, the studies illustrate that self-interest frames can shift preferences, and the effectiveness depends more on the respondents’ interpretations of the policy effect than on any particular characteristic of the frame.

B. New Methodological Approach

This dissertation provides a new multi-method approach to the study of self-interest in public opinion with in-depth interviews, survey analysis and framing experiments. Each of the
three methods has strengths and weakness, and the different approaches complement one another.

The in-depth interviews described in Chapter 2 provided a rich understanding of people’s self-interest. The interviews, which each lasted about ninety minutes, allowed for a detailed exploration of people’s self-interest. The open-ended questions gave respondents the chance to explain their beliefs in their own words and demonstrated differences across both individuals and issues. The structure of the interviews (i.e. respondents expressing preferences for policies) also allowed the data to be compared to the results of close-ended surveys used in past studies of self-interest. The interviews facilitated the collection of extensive amount of information about people’s self-interest, beliefs about policies, and preferences. The nondirective, exploratory nature of this data collection methodology was ideal for exploring how people think about self-interest without imposing an artificial structure on to their perceptions and beliefs. The major weaknesses of the in depth interviews are the small, nonrepresentative sample size and concerns about the direction of the relationships observed between self-interest and policy preferences. The small sample size limited the generalizability of the results and the fifty respondents were not representative of the broader population. The sample was significantly more educated, politically liberal, wealthy, and white than the general population. The sample demonstrated a large degree of variance in how people think about their self-interest, and a larger more diverse sample could have highlighted even more differences across people.

The survey analysis studies described in Chapter 3 featured two samples representative of the adult population of a single metropolitan area (Chicago) and a nationally representative sample of adults in the U.S. for the health care study. Therefore the results of these studies are more generalizable. The method showed that the effects of self-interest were consistent even
when controlling for demographic factors such as age, gender, education, income, and partisanship. The major weaknesses of the survey analysis studies, however, are that the measures of both objective and subjective self-interest lacked the nuance and richness of the measures of self-interest found in the in-depth interviews. Evaluating a person’s self-interest in any issue with only a couple of questions is difficult and can oversimplify a construct as complex as self-interest. In addition, the survey analysis studies used cross sectional survey data. Therefore, the extent to which one can draw strong conclusions about causality is also limited in these studies.

The survey framing experiments described in Chapter 4 isolated the effects of appeals to self-interest on preferences, and both the proposals and frames were highly salient and realistic. The issues selected were ones that had been the subject of a great deal of public debate and the policies and arguments used in the frames were drawn from data obtained in the in-depth interviews and analysis of media coverage of the issues. The experiments were conducted with diverse community samples, but they were not probability samples of the population. Because respondents were randomly assigned to treatments, the experiments controlled for all factors besides the manipulation of the policy messages and these studies provide the strongest causal evidence that self-interest influences policy preferences. Self-interest messages were associated with changes in attitudes, and the frames mirrored those found in current public policy debates. However, the survey framing experiments still failed to capture the full complexity of public policy debates. Respondents received only one or two messages from a single source at one point in time. In contrast, people often receive information about policies from a variety of sources and at different points in time. The source of the message can impact people’s acceptance of the information, and the experiments did not test how the source influences the effects of messages.
In addition, the survey framing respondents were not representative of a national sample, and the samples were more highly educated and whiter than the general public. The experiments show that self-interest messages can lead to changes in attitudes under experimental conditions, but these conditions may be different than those of a national public policy debate.

Therefore, although the methodologies used in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 have different strengths and weaknesses, the combination of approaches provides strong evidence for my conclusions. The in-depth interviews capture the complexity of self-interest, and the framing experiments isolate self-interest to demonstrate how it affects preferences. At the same time, the survey analysis provides the most generalizable findings about the effect of self-interest when controlling for standard demographic factors. Each method has its limitations, but combined the approach is both highly reliable and generalizable.

C. Limitations

A potential limitation of this research, and any study of self-interest, is determining how best to define self-interest and apply the construct across individuals. Many past studies define self-interest as an individual’s short-term material gain or loss (Sears and Funk 1991). However, the in-depth interviews demonstrate that many people construe their self-interest more broadly. Some people include their family or community in their interest, and others think about either nonmaterial or long-term benefits/losses. As a result, this research defines people’s self-interest as whatever they believe is in their personal interest. However, this more broad definition of self-interest can make it challenging to clearly separate self-interest from political values. For some individuals a political value (e.g. fairness or liberty) could be so important that they perceive the pursuit of this value as a part of their self-interest. Several interview participants acknowledged
their preferences were based on values, which were different than their self-interest, while others said it was very difficult to separate the two concepts. Likewise, the survey analysis revealed that self-interest can moderate and mediate the effects of values on preferences, and these findings illustrates that the effects of values and self-interest on preferences are not independent. Yet, subjective self-interest only partially mediates the effect of values, and values have independent direct effects on policy preferences even when controlling for self-interest. Values and self-interest are distinct concepts, and the multi-method approach shows that drawing clear boundaries around self-interest is difficult. While narrower definitions of self-interest provide more clear distinctions between values and self-interest, the conceptualization of interest in this research accounts for the clear differences in people’s beliefs about self-interest.

These different conceptions of self-interest also limit the ability to develop experimental frames that widely appeal to the interests of a general population sample. As the in-depth interviews show, people with similar objective characteristics often have different conceptions of their interest. As a result, it is difficult to have a self-interest frame in a survey experiment that appeals to each person’s interest because not all people will find the same frames persuasive. Even in the experiments featuring targeted messages, the frames were tailored to only one personal characteristic and multiple characteristics likely influenced people’s interest. This challenge of diverse interests can be mitigated during campaigns as politicians develop specific messages for groups with strong common interests (e.g. union members, gun owners or veterans). In order to improve the reliability of self-interest framing experiments, more information about respondents is needed before designing the frames. Panel surveys, in which researchers know a great deal about the sample, provide one potential approach to improve the reliability of self-interest framing experiments.
The research in this dissertation focuses on three issues, and self-interest may have different effects across other issues. The three issues include a more financially oriented topic (taxes) and a more social socially oriented topic (immigration), and all three issues are highly salient topics that are often debated publicly. However, the effects of self-interest may differ for novel or less salient issues. A study of self-interest across more issues could help identify how different issue characteristics impact the effects of self-interest on preferences.

D. Future Research

The findings from this research provide several topics for further study. The dissertation shows that how people perceive policies will affect them has a major influence on preferences, and more research is needed into subjective self-interest. Surveys with nationally representative samples could explore why people’s conceptions of their self-interest differ and what individual factors or traits explain these variations. For example, studies could examine whether personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness or openness impact people’s subjective self-interest (Caprara et al. 2006; Mondak and Halperin 2008; Gerber et al. 2010). Likewise, survey research could explore whether cultural measures such as individualism, collectivism, hedonism or obedience influence people’s conceptions of self-interest (Schwartz 1994; Layman and Carmines 1997; Fiske 2002). These studies could provide evidence of the traits or factors that lead people to have more broad or narrow conceptions of self-interest and could also explore why self-interest has more or less effects on some people’s preferences.

All of the studies in this dissertation are based on cross-sectional data and do not capture change over time. Longitudinal studies could help illustrate if and how people’s beliefs about the effects of policies change based on their experiences, new events or new information. For
example, panel surveys could demonstrate whether public debate about an issue during presidential campaigns affects people’s beliefs about policies and their self-interest. Likewise, researchers could interview/survey respondents both before and after the enactment of a policy (e.g. tax increase or new health law) and compare if and how people update their beliefs about the policy and their self-interest. The research could indicate what types of information or factors cause people to adapt their conceptions of self-interest and how this varies across people.

There is also a need to refine and expand measures of subjective self-interest on surveys with more questions examining how respondents’ perceive a policy will affect them and why they have such beliefs. Questions about people’s perceptions of the effects of policies should measure their beliefs about both the magnitude (large or small) and direction (positive or negative) of the effects on. If possible, measures of self-interest and policy perceptions should tap into multiple dimensions of an issue. For example, measures of self-interest toward immigration or health care issues should explore respondents’ perceptions of the economic, social and political ramifications of the policy. Such improved measures would provide researchers more reliable data to further study how people develop self-interest and how these beliefs influence attitudes and decision making.

Future research into the effects of self-interest on preferences should take a broader approach than previous studies that simply compare self-interest to political ideology or partisanship. Researchers should more closely examine the relationship between self-interest and political values, and determine how these factors interact to influence preferences. This dissertation demonstrates that self-interest is not independent of political ideology or partisanship. At the same time, the research shows that self-interest is distinct from partisanship or ideology as self-interest is based on people’s conceptions of how a policy will affect them.
personally. In-depth interviews could explore how people perceive of the relationship between their political values and self-interest. Likewise, surveys with nationally representative samples could assess whether people’s conceptions of self-interest are associated with partisanship, ideology, racial tolerance, or other political beliefs.

E. **Rethinking the Role of Self-Interest in Public Opinion**

The findings in this dissertation demonstrate that neither pure rational choice models nor traditional symbolic politics models accurately portray the role of self-interest in preferences. Instead, the results from this research provide evidence of a bounded-rationality model in which people often base their preferences on what they believe is in their best interest (Simon 1995; Conlisk 1996; Rubinstein 1998). People do not always follow their objective interests or base their preferences solely on maximizing their material gain as rational choice models would suggest (Downs 1957; Olson 1965). At the same time, the interviews show people often base their preferences on their subjective self-interest, which is from with the limited information they have available and may be influenced by their partisanship or ideology. As a result, people do not rely solely on ideology or partisanship when forming their preferences as symbolic politics models predict (Sears and Funk 1991). This research does not explicitly develop or test a new model of decision-making, but it illustrates the need to synthesize rational choice and symbolic politics models because people often develop attitudes toward issues based on what they believe is in their interest.

The notion that people’s preferences are often based on their subjective self-interest has several important implications for public opinion and American democracy. The findings show that people do not develop their attitudes solely in response to political symbols such as
partisanship or ideology. As a result, political campaigns and parties should not use only abstract political symbols to shape people’s preferences and influence public opinion. In contrast, the framing experiments show that messages about how policies will affect people’s lives can change preferences. The effects of self-interest on preferences provide strong incentives for campaigns and politicians to focus more on policy consequences and outcomes and less on abstract ideals or values during policy debates. At the same time, the fact most people do not conceive of their interest solely in terms of personal material gain can help prevent a tyranny of the majority. Many people include their broader community in their interest and support policies that may lead to a personal sacrifice if they believe it will ultimately help their community and themselves. A self-interested public is not one that relies only on abstract symbols or bases decisions on individual material gain, but it is one that prefers policies that will further its broadly construed interest.
VI. CITED LITERATURE


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VII. APPENDICES

A. Appendix I – Interview Questionnaire

To start off…

What political issues or policies most interest you and why?

Now, I’m going to ask you questions about Medicare. Medicare is complex and many people know very little about it. Even if you know little, your opinions are very important and helpful.

What are your thoughts about Medicare, the government health care program for the elderly?

Have you heard anything recently about Medicare from either news reports or conversations with family members and friends?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about proposals to reform Medicare…

Some people have proposed raising the eligibility age of Medicare from 65 years old to 67 years old for people born after 1963. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Some people have proposed changing Medicare benefits so that people with incomes under $100,000 a year receive more benefits than people with higher incomes. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your attitudes toward Medicare…

What factors do you think most influence your opinions and attitudes about such Medicare policies?

Now, I’m going to ask you some questions about local taxes…
What are your thoughts about local taxes such as property tax and sales tax?

Have you heard anything recently about property taxes and/or sales taxes from either news reports or conversations with family members and friends?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about proposals to reform local taxes…

Some people have proposed decreasing the state sales tax and reducing spending on schools. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Some people have proposed increasing property tax rates, and increasing spending on local services. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your attitudes regarding local taxes…

What factors do you think most influence your opinions and attitudes about such local tax policies?

Now, I’m going to ask you questions about federal immigration policies. Federal immigration is a very complex policy and many people know very little about it. Even if you know very little, your opinions are very important and helpful.

What are your thoughts about federal immigration policies such as those granting citizenship and work visas to foreigners?

Have you heard anything recently about such federal immigration policies from either news reports or conversations with family members and friends?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about proposals to reform federal immigration policies…
Some people have proposed providing a path to citizenship for millions of people currently in this country illegally so they could become citizens while continuing to work and live in this country. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Some people have proposed encouraging greater immigration from highly skilled workers by making it easier for engineers, computer programmers, and workers in science/technology fields to receive visas and work in the United States. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your attitudes regarding federal immigration…

What factors do you think most influence your opinions and attitudes about such federal immigration policies?

Now, I’m going to ask you questions about the Affordable Care Act, the health care reform law enacted in 2010.

What are your thoughts about the Affordable Care Act, the health care reform law enacted in 2010?

Have you heard anything recently about the Affordable Care Act from either news reports or conversations with family members and friends?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about particular parts of the law …

The Affordable Care Act requires that all people have health insurance. Do you support or oppose this policy?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?
How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

The Affordable Care Act calls for expanding Medicaid, the government subsidized health care program for low-income residents. Do you support or oppose this policy?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your attitudes regarding the law…

What factors do you think most influence your opinions and attitudes about the law?

Now, I’m going to ask you a couple of general questions about federal taxes…

What are your thoughts about federal taxes such as income taxes and capital gains taxes, which are taxes on income earned from investments such as stocks, houses or other assets?

Have you heard anything recently about income taxes and capital gains taxes from either news reports or conversations with family members and friends?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about proposals to reform federal taxes…

Some people have proposed eliminating capital gains taxes, which are the taxes people pay on profits they earn from houses, stocks or other assets. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Some people have proposed raising income taxes on American families making over $100,000 a year. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?
Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your attitudes regarding federal taxes…

What factors do you think most influence your opinions and attitudes about such federal tax policies?

Now, I’m going to ask you a couple of general questions about local immigration policies…

What are your thoughts about immigration policies in your state and city such as those involving enforcement of federal immigration laws and tuition for illegal immigrants at public colleges?

Have you heard anything recently about such state and local immigration policies from either news reports or conversations with family members and friends?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about proposals to reform local immigration policies…

Some people have proposed that state and local police in Illinois arrest and detain people who are not legal citizens for violating immigration laws. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Some people have proposed Illinois designate a certain percent of its admissions and scholarships to state universities for immigrants who are not U.S. citizens in order to promote diversity at local colleges. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

Why?

Who does this policy affect and to what degree?

How does the policy affect them (groups named in previous question)?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your attitudes regarding local immigration policies…

What factors do you think most influence your opinions and attitudes about such local immigration policies?

Now I’m going to ask you a couple of questions about your self-interest and preferences…
What do you think is your self-interest when it comes to political policies?

Does Medicare policy affect you?

Would raising the eligibility age of Medicare affect you?

Would means testing Medicare affect you?

Does your self-interest affect your views on Medicare policies?

Does the Affordable Care affect you?

Would the insurance mandate affect you?

Would expanding Medicaid affect you?

Does your self-interest affect your views on the Affordable Care Act?

Do income and capital gains tax policies affect you?

Would raising incomes taxes on families making over $100,000 a year affect you?

Would eliminating capital gains taxes affect you?

Does your self-interest affect your views on income and capital gains tax policies?

Do property and sales tax policies affect you?

Would cutting sales taxes and reducing spending on schools affect you?

Would raising property taxes and increasing spending on local services affect you?

Does your self-interest affect your views on property and sales tax policies?

Do national immigration policies affect you?

Would a path to citizenship affect you?

Would increasing the number of high-skilled work visas affect you?

Does your self-interest influence your views on national immigration policies such as those granting citizenship or work visas to foreigners?

Do local immigration policies affect you?
Would local police enforcing immigration laws affect you?

Would setting aside spots and scholarships for illegal immigrants at public universities affect you?

Does your self-interest influence your views on local immigration policies such as the enforcement of federal immigration laws and tuition for illegal immigrants at public colleges?

Now there are just a few questions about you.

What sources do you usually receive political information and news from?

When it comes to politics, do you usually think of yourself as extremely liberal, liberal, slightly liberal, moderate or middle of the road, slightly conservative, conservative or extremely conservative?

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican or Independent? (If D or R) Would you call yourself a strong D/R or not very strong D/R? (If I) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party or neither party?

How often do you vote? Do you participate in any other political activities such as donating to a campaign, volunteering for a campaign, signing a petition?

What is your zip code?

Do you have any children? What are their ages?

What is your profession/occupation?

What is your age?

What is the highest degree you have earned?

Do you or any family members receive Medicare benefits?

Do you or any family members receive Medicaid benefits?

Do you have health insurance?

Does everyone in your family have health insurance?

Were you born in this country?

Were both parents born in this country?
Were all four of your grandparents born in this country?

Are you a U.S. citizen?

(If not) Are you currently applying for citizenship, planning to apply for citizenship or not planning to apply for citizenship?

Are any of your friends or co-workers not U.S. citizens?

In your estimation how much was your total family household income last year?

Do you have investments that could lead to capital gains taxes?

In your estimation, how much did you pay in capital gains taxes last year?

Do you pay property taxes?

In your estimation, how much did you pay in property taxes last year?

(Tailor start and end brackets to respondent) Now I have a couple of quick questions about your family’s income last year. Was it more than $20,000? More than $40,000? More than $80,000? More than $120,000? More than $160,000? More than $200,000? More than $250,000? More than $500,000? More than $1 million?
B. Appendix II – Data Coding Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Objective Self-Interest</th>
<th>Policy Preference</th>
<th>Causal Script</th>
<th>Subjective Self-Interest</th>
<th>Subjective SI relate to Script</th>
<th>Subjective SI differ from Objective SI</th>
<th>Subjective SI relate to policy preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Care</td>
<td>Means testing Medicare benefits so $100k get less</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Require all people to have health insurance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raise Medicare eligibility age 65 to 67</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Expand Medicaid program</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State college scholarships for illegal immigrants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More national skilled worker visas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National path to citizenship for illegal immigrants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local enforcement of immigration laws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>Cut local sales taxes, school funding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raise local property taxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eliminate capital gains taxes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raise income tax on $100K</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although my respondents are more educated, affluent, and liberal than the general population, none of these characteristics is a significant predictor of the features of decision-making that I analyze here. Table XXII below shows that all three factors are weakly correlated with the four key dependent variables in my study: 1) consistency of objective self-interest and policy preferences, 2) likelihood of identifying subjective self-interest in a policy, 3) consistency between subjective and objective self-interest, and 4) propensity to engage in symbolic or self-interested decision making. (For comparison, the correlation between ideology and partisanship is a relatively strong .64.) Therefore, the socioeconomic and political tendencies of my interview respondents do not appear to have significantly affected the distributions I presented on these main variables of interest. The weak correlations between the key variables and ideology, income, and education suggest the broader applicability of my findings from the nonrandom sample of respondents I interviewed, although it remains important to examine the reasoning processes of respondents with fewer of the political resources than my respondents possessed.

Table XXXII: Correlations Between Key Variables and Ideology, Income, and Education for In-depth Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Objective Self-Interest Consistent with Preferences</th>
<th>Identify Subjective Self-Interest</th>
<th>Subjective Self-Interest Differ from Objective Self-Interest</th>
<th>Decision-making Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.07 (600)</td>
<td>-.08 (600)</td>
<td>.07 (406)</td>
<td>-.13 (598)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-.03 (504)</td>
<td>.09 (504)</td>
<td>.07 (347)</td>
<td>-.06 (502)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.01 (600)</td>
<td>.11 (600)</td>
<td>.03 (406)</td>
<td>-.05 (598)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IV—Question Wordings/Variable Coding for Effects Study 1

Policy preferences and attitudes

Iraq war. To measure policy preferences with regards to the Iraq War, respondents were asked: “From what you have seen or heard about the situation in Iraq, what should the United States do now: should the U.S. increase the number of troops in Iraq, keep the same number of troops, decrease the number of troops, or remove all its troops from Iraq?” The responses were coded 0= increase, .33=same, .66=decrease and 1=remove all.

School funding. Respondents were asked the following question to assess their opinions about school funding: “Do you think that funding for public schools needs to be increased to improve their quality or do you think funding for public schools does not need to be increased if current funding is used more effectively?” The responses were coded 0= no increase and 1= increase.

Gentrification. To measure attitudes about gentrification, respondents were asked: “In general, would you say gentrification is mainly a good thing or mainly a bad thing?” The data was coded 0=bad thing and 1=good thing.

Affirmative action. For affirmative action, respondents were asked: “Now let me read you two brief statements on affirmative action programs for Blacks and other minorities. I’m going to ask which one comes closer to your own point of view. Affirmative action programs are still needed to make up for the effects of discrimination against minorities, and help reduce racial inequality, or affirmative action programs have gone too far in favoring minorities, and should be phased out because they are unfair to whites.” The answers were coded 0=phase out and 1=still needed.
**Immigration.** For immigration, respondents were asked: “Which comes closest to your view about what government policy should be toward illegal immigrants currently residing in the United States. Should the government: One, deport all illegal immigrants from the U.S.; Two, allow illegal immigrants to remain for a limited amount of time in the U.S. in order to work, or; Three, allow illegal immigrants to remain in the U.S. and become U.S. citizens, but only if they meet certain requirements?” The data was coded 0=deport all, .5=limited time, and 1= allow become citizens.

**Subjective Self-Interest**

Respondents’ perceived self-interest was measured for each issue by asking them: “How much does this issue affect the way you live your life? Would you say a great deal, quite a bit, some, a little bit, or not at all?” Responses were coded to range from zero for “not at all” to one for “a great deal.”

**Objective Self-Interest**

**School funding.** Having a child in the Chicago public schools was used as the measure of objective self-interest for school funding. Respondents were first asked: “How many children age five to seventeen are living in your household?” Respondents who said they had at least one child in this age range living in their household were asked: “Do any of the children living in your household attend a public elementary, middle, or high school in the City of Chicago?” Respondents who had a school age child living in their household who attended a public school in the City of Chicago were coded 1. All other respondents were coded 0.

**Gentrification.** For gentrification, owning a home is used as a measure of objective self-interest. Respondents were asked: “Do you or your family own the home where you are currently living, are you renting, or do you have some other arrangement?” Respondents who reported
owning a home were given a value of 1. Respondents who reported not owning a home were given a value of 0 (those who refused to answer or said “don’t know” were coded as missing).

**Affirmative action.** For affirmative action, being black was used as an objective measure of self-interest. Respondents were asked: “Which of the following racial groups best describes you: White, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, or something else?” Respondents who said they were black were coded 1 and respondents who said they were something else were coded 0 to construct a black binary variable.

**Immigration.** Being Latino was used as the measure of objective self-interest for immigration. Respondents were asked: “Are you Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban, or some other Spanish origin?” Respondents who said they were Latinos were coded 1 and respondents who reported that they were not Latinos were coded 0 to construct a Latino binary variable.

**Symbolic Politics**

**Political ideology.** To measure political ideology respondents were asked: “In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal or very liberal?” The seven response categories were coded to range from 0 for very conservative and 1 for very liberal.

**Partisanship.** Respondents’ partisanship was measured by were asking: “Generally speaking do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, and Independent or something else?” Respondents who answered Republican or Democrat were asked: “Would you consider yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat) or a not very strong (Republican/Democrat)?” Respondents who said Independent were asked: “Do you think of yourself as closer to the
Republican Party of to the Democratic Party?” The seven response categories were coded to range from 0 for strong Republicans to 1 for strong Democrats.

Control Variables

Political interest. Political interest was measured by asking respondents: “How interested are you in politics? Are you extremely interested, very interested, somewhat interested, not very interested, or not at all interested?” These five responses were coded to range from 0 for not at all interested to 1 for extremely interested.

Political knowledge. For political knowledge respondents’ were asked three questions about local politics and three questions about national politics. The three local questions were: “Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Todd Stroger?” “Whose job is it to create the annual state budget; the governor, the state legislature, or the state supreme court?” “Do you happen to know the name of the Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools?” The three national questions were: “Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney?” “How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?” “Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington?” Political knowledge was coded as the proportion of questions the respondent answered correctly.

News consumption. To measure news consumption, respondents were asked five questions about different types of news consumption in the last week. For each of the five types of news (national television, local television, Internet, print newspaper and radio), respondents were asked how many days they consumed such news last week. The total number of days of consumption was summed and this index was recoded to range from 0 (no consumption of any kind of news on any day in the past week) to 1 (consumption of each of the five types of news on
each day during the past week).

**Income.** Respondents were asked the following set of questions about their income: “Was your total household income for the year 2007, from all sources, before taxes, more or less than $60,000?” Respondents who said their income was less than $60,000 were asked: “Was it less than $40,000?” Those who said it was less than $40,000 were asked: “Was it less than $20,000?” Respondents who said their income was more than $60,000 were asked: “Was it more than $80,000?” Respondents who said their income was more than $80,000 were asked: “Was it more than $100,000?” The variable was coded 0 for less than $20k, .20 for $20-40k, .40 for $40-60k, .60 for $60-$80k, .80 for $80-$100k, and 1 for more than $100k.

**Education.** Respondents were asked: “What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?” The variable was coded to range from 0 (zero years of education) to 1 (17 or more of education).

**Age.** Respondents were asked: “Now, we'd like to find out a little bit about you. In what year were you born?” The variable was coded to range from 0 (18 years old) to 1 (91 years old).

**Gender.** Interviewers reported the gender of respondents. The variable was coded 0 for female and 1 for male.
E. **Appendix V—Question Wordings/Variable Coding for Effect Study 2**

*Policy preferences and attitudes*

Respondents’ attitudes toward immigration policies were measured with a six-item index.

One item measured respondents’ general attitudes toward the level of immigration in the United States. Respondents were asked: “Do you think the number of immigrants to the United States nowadays should be increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?” The data is coded 0=decreased a lot; .25=decreased a little; .50=remain the same as it is now; .75=increased a little; 1=increased a lot. This question or a similar question has been used as a dependent variable in past studies of immigration attitudes (Citrin et al. 1997; Nteta 2013).

A second item measures respondents’ attitudes toward border enforcement. Respondents were asked: “Should efforts to stop undocumented immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border be increased, decreased, or stay the same?” The data is coded 0=increased; .5=stay the same; 1=decreased.

The third item measured respondents’ attitudes toward worksite raids of undocumented immigrants. Respondents were asked: “Should worksite raids to arrest undocumented immigrants be increased, decreased, or stay the same?” Responses were coded 0=increased; .5=stay the same; 1=decreased.

A fourth policy question measured respondents’ attitudes toward deportation of undocumented immigrants. Respondents were asked: “Should the deportation of undocumented immigrants be increased, decreased, or stay the same?” The data is coded 0=increased; .5=stay the same; 1=decreased.
Another item measures respondents’ attitudes toward a Congressional proposal called the Dream Act. Respondents were asked: “There are many undocumented youth living in the United States who were brought to this country at a young age by their undocumented parents. The U.S. Congress is considering legislation, called the Dream Act, that would allow those youth who are in college or serving in the military to become legal permanent residents. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this legislation?” The data is coded 0=strongly oppose; .33=somewhat oppose; .66=somewhat support; 1=strongly support.

A final question measured respondents’ attitudes toward college tuition for undocumented immigrants. Respondents were asked: “Currently, undocumented immigrant students attending public colleges in Illinois pay the same tuition as Illinois residents. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this policy?” The data is coded 0=strongly oppose; .33=somewhat oppose; .66=somewhat support; 1=strongly support.

The answers to these questions were averaged together to create an immigration attitude index. The index measured support for more open versus restrictive immigration policies with higher values indicating support for pro-immigration policies and lower values indicating support for anti-immigration policies.

*Subjective Self-Interest*

Respondents’ subjective self-interest was measured using four-questions assessing the extent to which respondents thought Latino immigrants would have a negative or a positive effect on them. Respondents were asked “First, do Latino immigrants make the overall quality of life in (your city) better, worse, or do they not have much effect?” Responses were coded 0 for worse, .5 for not have much effect, and 1 for better.
A second question asked: “How about the quality of public schools? Would you say Latino immigrants make the quality of public schools in (your city) better, worse, or do they not have much effect?” Responses were coded 0 for worse, .5 for not have much effect, and 1 for better.

The third question asked: “And what about crime rates? Would you say Latino immigrants increase crime rates, decrease crime rates, or do they not have much effect on crimes rates in (your city)?” The data is coded 0=increase; .5=not have much effect; 1=decrease.

The fourth question asked: “How much do you think Latino immigrants threaten your personal economic situation? Would you say a great deal, some, not much, or not at all?” The data is coded 0=great deal; .33=some; .66=not much; 1=not at all.

The answers to these questions were summed together to create a subjective self-interest index ranging from 0 (most negative effect) to 1 (most positive effect).

Objective Self-Interest

Respondents’ objective self-interest toward immigration was measured in two different ways. The first objective measure of self-interest is simply whether a person is Latino or not. Respondents were asked: “Which of the following racial groups describes you: White, Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, or something else?” The data was coded 1=Latino and 0=not Latino.

I also tested a second objective measure of self-interest that expands upon the first variable to include being Latino, being close to an immigrant, and not being a citizen. In addition to the question about their race and ethnicity, respondents were also asked: “Are you a citizen of the United States?” and respondents were asked: “Is anyone you consider close to you – a relative, friend, neighbor, co-worker, or someone else close to you – an undocumented
immigrant?” The second self-interest variable was coded 1 if any of the three questions indicated that their self-interest was engaged (e.g. if they were Latino, a non-citizen, or if they were close to an undocumented immigrant). All other respondents were given a code of 0 for this measure.

Symbolic Politics

Racial tolerance. Respondents’ racial tolerance toward Latino immigrants was measured with a six-question index. The index measured positive and negative feelings toward Latino immigrants as a group.

Two questions in the survey assess perceptions of Latino immigrants’ work ethic and responsibility. Respondents were asked: “How hard-working are Latino immigrants? Very hard-working, somewhat hard-working, not very hard-working, or not at all hard-working?” Answers were coded from 0 (not at all hard-working) to 1 (very hard-working). Respondents were also asked: “How willing are Latino immigrants to learn English? Would you say very willing, somewhat willing, not very willing, or not at all willing?” Answers were coded from 0 (not at all willing) to 1 (very willing).

Two additional questions assess beliefs about whether Latino immigrants make excessive demands. Respondents were asked: “Latino immigrants use too many government services. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?” Answers were coded from 0 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Respondents were also asked: “Latino immigrants are too demanding in their push for immigrant rights. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?” Answers were coded from 0 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

Finally, two questions assess the perceived cultural or economic threat of Latino immigrants. Respondents were asked: “Latino immigrants take jobs from American workers. Do
you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?” Answers were coded from 0 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Respondents were also asked: “How important is it that people begin to think of themselves as American and not as Italian American, Mexican American, Polish American, and so on. Is it very important, somewhat important or not at all important?” Answers were coded from 0 (very important) to 1 (not at all important).

The values for the six questions were summed to create the index, and the index was coded from 0 (low racial tolerance) to 1 (high racial tolerance).

Partisanship and ideology. To measure partisanship, respondents were asked: “Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?” Partisanship was coded using two binary dummy variables. One variable was coded 1 for Democrat respondents and 0 for all other respondents. A second dummy variable was coded 1 for Republican respondents and 0 for all other respondents.

To measure ideology, respondents were asked: “In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal or very liberal?” The five point ordinal variable was coded from 0 (very conservative) to 1 (very liberal).

Control Variables

Race. To measure race, respondents answered the following question: “Which of the following racial groups describes you: White, Black or African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, or something else?” Race groups were then examined using two binary dummy variables. One variable was coded 1 for Black respondents and 0 for all other respondents. A second dummy variable was coded 1 for Latino respondents and 0 for all other respondents.
Political activity. To measure political activity, respondents were asked: “In general how politically active are you? Would you say very active, somewhat active, not very active, or not at all active?” The four-point ordinal variable was coded from 0 (not at all active) to 1 (very active).

Education. To measure education, respondents were asked: “What is the highest degree that you have earned?” The five-point ordinal variable was coded from 0 (no high school degree) to 1 (advanced degree).

Age. Respondents were asked their date of birth. Age was calculated and was coded as a continuous variable that ranged from 0 (18 years old) to 1 (96 years old).

Gender. Gender was coded as a binary variable with 0 for women and 1 for men.

Income. Total household income was asked with a series of branching questions beginning with $60,000. Income was coded as an ordinal variable ranging from 0 to 1 with four income ranges: less than $20,000, between $20,001 and $60,000, between $60,001 and $100,000, and more than $100,000.
F. Appendix VI–Question Wordings/Variable Coding for Effects Study 3

Policy Attitudes

The variable is based on the following question: “As you may know, a health reform bill was signed into law in 2010. Given what you know about the health reform law, do you have a generally favorable or generally unfavorable opinion of it? (If Favorable/Unfavorable, ask): Is that a very favorable/unfavorable or somewhat favorable/unfavorable opinion?” Responses to these two questions were used to create a four-point ordinal variable that was coded from 0 (very unfavorable) to 1 (very favorable).

Subjective Self-Interest

Subjective self-interest was measured by asking respondents: “Do you think you and your family will be better off or worse off under the (2010) health reform law, or don't you think it will make much difference?” The three-point ordinal variable was coded 0 for worse off, .5 for not much difference and 1 for better off.

Objective Self-Interest

Respondents were asked: “Are you, yourself, now covered by any form of health insurance or health plan or do you not have health insurance at this time? (Read if necessary): A health plan would include any private insurance plan through your employer or a plan that you purchased yourself, as well as a government program like Medicare or Medicaid/Medi-Cal?” The binary variable was coded 0 (does not have insurance) and 1 (has insurance).

Symbolic Politics

Political ideology. Political ideology was measured by asking respondents: “Would you say your views in most political matters are liberal, moderate or conservative?” Conservatives were coded 0; moderates were coded .5; and liberals were coded 1.
Partisanship. In order to measure partisanship, respondents were asked: “In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, an Independent, or what? (If Democrat/Republican, ask): Would you call yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or not a very strong Democrat/Republican?” A 5-point ordinal variable was coded to range from 0 (strong Republican) to 1 (strong Democrat) with those reporting they were Independents or something else coded as .5.

Control Variables

Education. Respondents were asked: “What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?” Education was coded with a four-point ordinal variable ranging from 0 (less than high school degree) to 1 (college degree or advanced degree).

Age. Respondents were asked: “Could you please tell if you are between the ages of 18-24…25-34…35-44…45-54…55-64…65+?” Age was coded 0 for 18-24 year old respondents; .20 for 25-34 year old respondents; .40 for 35-44 year old respondents; .60 for 45-54 year old respondents; .80 for 55-64 year old respondents; and 1 for respondents 65 years or older.

Household income. For income, respondents were asked: “Last year – that is, in 2011 – what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category…Less than $20,000…$20,000 to less than $30,000…$30,000 to less than $40,000…$40,000 to less than $50,000…$50,000 to less than $75,000…$75,000 to less than $90,000…$90,000 to less than $100,000…$100,000 or more.” Annual household income was coded into an eight-point ordinal variable ranging from 0 to 1.

Race and ethnicity. Respondents were asked the following questions about their race and ethnicity: “Are you, yourself, of Hispanic or Latino background, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican,
Cuban, or some other Spanish background? What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian or some other race?” Race was coded with a binary variable for blacks (0=not black and 1=black) and ethnicity was coded with a binary variable for Latinos (0=not Latino and 1=Latino).

**Gender.** Interviewers observed and reported the gender of respondents. Gender was coded a binary variable with 0=woman and 1=man.

**Month of interview.** Because the data came from multiple surveys, analysis also controlled for the month of the survey. Month was coded as an 18-point ordinal variable ranging from 0 (February 2011) to 1 (October 2012).
G. Appendix VII – Frame Development for Framing Study 1

The policy proposals and frames are based on both media reports and in-depth interviews exploring people’s attitudes toward immigration, health care and tax policies (see Chapter 2). During the in-depth interviews, people were asked to explain their beliefs about how immigration, health care and tax policies would impact themselves, others and the broader society. The responses to the interviews served as the basis for the frames. For example, the self-interest frame for Medicare cuts was similar to interview responses such as: “I think how hard I have worked, and it is ridiculous I have to pay for someone else’s health care. I’m all for anything lowering my taxes.” Likewise, the arguments for property and income tax hikes are based on interview answers such as: “We are taxed to take care of services, and if we want good roads and parks we have to pay for it.” Many of the arguments from the interviews were similar to the arguments found in media reports. A search of newspaper stories in the prior year highlighted some of the most common arguments for each issue, and these were used to develop the frames. For example, the expanding Medicaid self-interest frame was based on reports such as the following: “The CEO of a rural Missouri hospital system warned Monday that it could face financial peril unless state lawmakers back a Democratic plan to expand the Medicaid health care program” (Associated Press 2013). Likewise, the self-interest frame for limiting work visas was based on arguments in the media such as the following: “The H-1B program should not be used to facilitate the transfer of high-paying jobs to other countries” (States News Service 2013).

The self-interest and value frames were also revised based on interviews with twelve people who were asked to evaluate the frames. The interview sample was not representative of the population, but was a convenience sample with people of various ages and levels of political interest. During the interviews, people read each frame and explained why they thought it was or
was not persuasive. The respondents were also asked about whether each frame was easy to understand and realistic. Revisions were made to the frames based on the feedback from these interviews.

The self-interest frames all feature arguments highlighting the potential personal benefits of the policy to respondents. Each of the frames explicitly states how the policy would benefit “you,” “people like you,” “your community” or “your family.” The arguments may not always have been factually correct for all respondents due to differences in respondents’ personal situations. For example, a limit on highly skilled foreign workers may not make it easier for all people to find jobs, and income tax increases might not provide more federal money for programs benefitting all people. However, the self-interest frames highlight realistic possible benefits for many respondents, and these frames are similar to messages people receive about policies from politicians and the media. It is very difficult to design frames that highlight objectively true personal benefits for each individual respondent in such a large and heterogeneous sample. The subjective nature of the frames in these experiments increases the difficulty of showing self-interest messages can influence people’s preferences because some respondents may not believe the message to be accurate or credible.

The value frames are designed to appeal to people’s core political values, which are based on their beliefs about government, citizenship and society (McCann 1997). Core political values often serve as a basis for more specific attitudes and beliefs (Converse 1964; Feldman 1988), and they relate to broader human values such as power, universalism and security (Schwartz 1992; Schwartz 1994; Schwartz et al. 2010). There is no clear consensus among scholars about what constitutes core political values, but researchers have identified values such
as liberty, equality, social order, limited government, traditionalism and economic security

(Feldman 1988; McCann 1997; Goren 2005; Jacoby 2006).
H. Appendix VIII – Frames/Questions for Framing Study 1

Medicare Cuts

Control: Some people have proposed large cuts in the national health care program for the elderly known as Medicare. What best describes your position on this proposal:

Self-Interest Frame: Proponents say it would lower the amount of taxes you have to pay each month to fund other people's health care.

Value Frame: Proponents say it would help limit the role of the federal government in people's health care.

Competing Frame: Proponents say it would help limit the role of the federal government in people's health care. Opponents say it would reduce the quality of health care you would receive as a senior citizen.

Medicaid Expansion

Control: Some people have proposed increased spending on the state health care program for the poor and disabled known as Medicaid. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Frame: Proponents say it would reduce the financial burden on your hospital and improve care for people like you.

Value Frame: Proponents say it would help the government provide all people their basic right to health care.

Competing Frame: Proponents say it would reduce the financial burden on your hospital and improve care for people like you. Opponents say it would create more welfare queens and government takers.

Property Tax Increase

Control: Some people have proposed a 3 percent increase in the property tax in Elmhurst. What
best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Frame: Proponents say it would provide more money to fund roads and parks in your community.

Value Frame: Proponents say it would ensure people pay their fair share for local services and programs benefitting them.

Competing Frame: Proponents say it would provide more money to fund roads and parks in your community. Opponents say it would take more money away from individuals and promote big government.

Income Tax Increase

Control: Some people have proposed a 3 percent increase in the amount of federal income taxes that all Americans pay. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Frame: Proponents say it would increase the amount of money available for government programs benefitting you and your family.

Value Frame: Proponents say it would make sure people pay their fair share to fund government services and programs benefitting all citizens.

Competing Frame: Proponents say it would make sure people pay their fair share to fund government services and programs benefitting all citizens. Opponents say it would reduce the amount of money you will earn.

Path to Citizenship

Control: Some people have proposed offering citizenship to all illegal immigrants currently living in this country. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Frame: Proponents say it would expand the labor force and tax base, which would keep both taxes and the costs of goods/services low for you.
Value Frame: Proponents say it would ensure all people receive an equal opportunity in this country.

Competing Frame: Proponents say it would expand the labor force and tax base, which would keep both taxes and the costs of goods/services low for you. Opponents say it would encourage breaking the law and undermine America's legal principles.

Limit Foreign Work Visas

Control: Some people have proposed limiting the number of highly skilled foreign workers allowed to hold jobs in Illinois. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Frame: Proponents say it would make it easier for you and your family members to get and keep a job.

Value Frame: Proponents say it would uphold the law and protect the rights of citizens.

Competing Frame: Proponents say it would uphold the law and protect the rights of citizens.

Opponents say it would reduce the diversity of your community.

Age. Respondents were asked, “In what year were you born?” Age was calculated and was coded as a continuous variable that ranged from 18 to 87.

Gender. Respondents were asked, “What is your gender?” Men were coded 1 and female were coded 0.

Ideology. Respondents were asked, “When it comes to politics, do you generally think of yourself as... Extremely Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Somewhat Conservative (or) Extremely Conservative?” The variable was coded from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative).

Partisanship. Respondents were asked, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a … Strong Republican, Republican, Weak Republican, Independent, Weak
Democrat, Democrat, (or) Strong Democrat?” The variable was coded from 1 (Strong Republican) to 7 (Strong Democrat).

*Education.* Respondents were asked, “What is the highest degree or level of education that you have completed?” The responses were coded from 1 (Less than a high school diploma) to 6 (Advanced degree).

*Race.* Respondents were asked, “Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino?” and then were asked, “Which of the following racial groups best describes you?” Based on these questions, the data was coded to include a binary variable for being Latino (coded 1 if Latino and 0 if not Latino) and a binary variable for being Black (coded 1 if black and 0 if not black).

*Income.* Respondents were asked, “Please circle the income group that includes that income of all members of your family living with you in 2012 before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.” The responses were coded from 1 (less than $10,000) to 8 (more than $400,000).
## I. Appendix IX – Question Order/Experimental Conditions for Framing Study 1

### Table XXXIII: Question Order and Experimental Conditions for Framing Study 1

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Appendix X – Frame Development for Framing Study 2

The proposals and frames were based on fifty in-depth interviews focused on people’s beliefs about tax, health care and immigration policies (see Chapter 2). During the interviews, people explained in detail how they believed twelve different policies (four tax, four health care, and four immigration) would affect them and others. Many of the policy proposals are similar to those discussed in the interviews (e.g. eliminating capital gains, raising Medicare eligibility age, and path to citizenship for illegal immigrants). Both the value and self-interest frames are based on the arguments of respondents in the in-depth interviews. For example, many respondents said eliminating capital gains would help people save for retirement, the pro self-interest frame. One respondent said: “Eliminating capital gains would help everyone with a 401k, which is most people.” Likewise, the con self-interest frame for a path to citizenship is based on the respondents in the in-depth interviews who said that it would raise taxes. One man said: “My taxes will go up because taxpayers will foot the bill for all the new citizens who need welfare.” With raising the age of Medicare, fifteen different interview respondents said they supported raising the age because it would ensure the program was financially solvent in the future and could provide them benefits when they were older, which is the basis for the pro self-interest frame.

The frames were revised and edited based on feedback from twenty people who evaluated the persuasiveness of each frame. The sample was not representative of the population but was a convenience sample with people of various and levels of political interest. The participants each received a copy of the frames and were asked to assign a rating of 1 to 5 for each frames based on how persuasive they found it. The respondents were also asked to provide suggestions in writing about how to make each frame more realistic, easy to understand and
persuasive. Based on the written feedback from the respondents, the frames were revised multiple times.
K. Appendix XI – Frames/Questions for Framing Study 2

Eliminating Capital Gains Taxes

Control: Capital gains are income people earn from selling investments such as stocks, houses or other assets. Some people have proposed eliminating taxes on income earned from capital gains while maintaining taxes on income earned from working. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Messages: Proponents say it (will most likely/might possibly) make it a (little/lot) easier for you to save for your retirement.

Value Message: Proponents say it would boost investments and provide people more economic freedom.

Competing Messages: Opponents say it would lead to government cuts in programs you use. Opponents say it would increase inequality.

Increasing Estate Taxes

Control: Some people have proposed increasing estate taxes, which are the taxes on property and money people leave behind when they die. They are sometimes referred to as an inheritance tax or death tax. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Messages: Proponents say the extra revenue (will most likely/might possibly) allow you to pay a (little/lot) less income tax.

Value Message: Proponents say it would make sure the wealthy pay their fair share.

Competing Messages: Opponents say it would reduce the amount of money you could inherit and prevent you from passing along your savings to others. Opponents say it would reduce incentives for people to work hard and save money.
Raising Eligibility Age of Medicare

Control: Some people have proposed raising the eligibility age of Medicare (the government insurance program for the elderly) from 65 years old to 70 years old. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Messages: Proponents say it (will most likely/might possibly) ensure that (all/some) Medicare benefits are available to you when you are 70.

Value Message: Proponents say it would ensure Medicare payments and benefits are fair for everyone.

Competing Messages: Opponents say it would make it more difficult for you to get health care when you are 65. Opponents say it would weaken the country's social safety net.

Creating a Single-Payer Health Care System

Control: Some people have proposed creating a single-payer health care system in which the federal government, not private insurers, would manage health care. The government would collect health care fees and pay health care costs for all Americans. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Messages: Proponents say it (will most likely/might possibly) make it a (lot/little) easier for you to get care if you lose your job, you change jobs, or you unexpectedly need care.

Value Message: Proponents say it would ensure health care is a basic right in this country.

Competing Messages: Opponents say it would limit what doctors and specialists you could see. Opponents say it would lead to a government takeover of health care and socialized medicine.

Providing Path to Citizenship for Illegal Immigrants
Control: Some people have proposed providing a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants in the U.S. if they meet certain requirements, including a waiting period, paying fines, passing criminal background checks, and learning English. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Messages: Opponents say it (will most likely/might possibly) lead to a (small/large) increase in your taxes because you will have to help pay for additional government services for the new citizens.

Value Message: Opponents say it would condone breaking the law and is unfair to citizens and legal immigrants.

Competing Messages: Proponents say it would lead to a decrease in your taxes because the new citizens would help pay for existing government programs such as Social Security. Proponents say it would promote the American Dream.

Increasing Border Security

Control: Some people have proposed increasing border security to reduce the number of illegal immigrants who enter the United States. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Self-Interest Messages: Opponents say it (will most likely/might possibly) lead to a (small/large) increase in the price you have to pay for many common goods and services such as food and housework.

Value Message: Opponents say it would lead to the government infringing on individuals’ liberties.

Competing Messages: Proponents say it would make it easier for you to keep a job and would help to increase your pay. Proponents say it would uphold law and order.
**Political Beliefs.** Respondents were asked: “How consistent with your political values and beliefs is the above proposal?” The six-point variable was coded from 0 (completely inconsistent) to 1 (completely consistent).

**Age.** Respondents were asked, “What year were you born?” Age was calculated and was coded as a continuous variable that ranged from 18 to 79.

**Gender.** Respondents were asked, “What is your gender?” Men were coded 1 and female were coded 0.

**Fiscal Ideology.** Respondents were asked, “When it comes to spending and tax issues, do you generally think of yourself as... Extremely Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Somewhat Conservative (or) Extremely Conservative?” The variable was coded from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative).

**Social Ideology.** Respondents were asked, “When it comes to social issues, do you generally think of yourself as... Extremely Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Somewhat Conservative (or) Extremely Conservative?” The variable was coded from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative).

**Partisanship.** Respondents were asked, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a …Strong Republican, Republican, Weak Republican, Independent, Weak Democrat, Democrat, (or) Strong Democrat?” The variable was coded from 1 (Strong Republican) to 7 (Strong Democrat).

**Education.** Respondents were asked, “What is the highest degree or level of education that you have completed?” The responses were coded from 1 (Some high school, but not a high school degree) to 6 (Advanced degree).
Race. Respondents were asked, “Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino?” and then were asked, “Which of the following racial groups best describes you?” Based on these questions, the data was coded to include a binary variable for being Latino (coded 1 if Latino and 0 if not Latino) and a binary variable for being Black (coded 1 if black and 0 if not black).

Income. Respondents were asked, “What was the total household income for all members of your family living with you in 2013 before taxes? This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.” The responses were coded from 1 (less than $10,000) to 8 (more than $400,000).
L.   **Appendix XII – Frame Development for Framing Study 3**

All of the self-interest frames and policies were based on an analysis of fifty in-depth interviews about tax, health care, and immigration policies (see Chapter 2). All three proposals in this study are similar to issues discussed in the in-depth interviews (i.e. tax increases, Medicare cuts, and scholarships for illegal immigrants). The frames are based on respondents’ explanations of how different policy proposals would affect themselves and others. For each issue in the in-depth interviews, respondents were asked, “Who would this policy affect and how?” In addition, respondents were asked: “Would this policy affect you? (If yes,) how?” People’s beliefs about how policies would affect them and others were used to craft frames appealing to people’s self-interest. For example, the most common argument against taxes in the interviews was it would limit people’s ability to save and spend money, which is the con self-interest frame in the study. Likewise, the pro self-interest frame for Medicare reductions was based on the responses of interview participants who said they supported Medicare cuts if it ensured the program was solvent and could provide some benefits to them. For example, a 29-year old said: “I just want to make sure it exists when I’m older and I have plenty of time to plan for less benefits as long as I get some benefits.” With scholarships for immigrants, one respondent highlighted the arguments used for both the pro and con self-interest frames when she said: “It would increase diversity at colleges, which is a great thing, but it could take funding away from my grandkids and make it more expensive for them.”

The frames were revised several times based on feedback and interviews with fourteen people. The interview sample was not representative of the population but was a convenience sample of people with various ages and levels of political interest. All of the participants received a written copy of the frames, and they were asked to carefully evaluate whether each
frame was easy to understand, realistic and persuasive. During the interviews, participants explained why the frames were or were not persuasive, and they were encouraged to suggest possible changes or modifications.
M. Appendix XIII – Frames/Questions for Framing Study 3

*Raising Income taxes*

Control: There has been lots of talk about reforming taxes. A new proposal calls for increasing income taxes on people making over $50,000 a year. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Over $50k group frames:

Proponents say it would lead to essential improvements in the infrastructure you rely on everyday such as your roads/transit systems and your water/sewer lines.

Opponents say it would significantly raise your taxes and reduce the amount of money you have to save or spend.

Under $50k group frames:

Proponents say it would help ensure your taxes will not increase.

Opponents say it would increase your taxes as your income rises in the coming years.

*Reducing Medicare benefits*

Control: Medicare is a taxpayer-funded program that provides health care benefits to Americans 65 and older. A new proposal calls for reducing future Medicare benefits for people currently 28 years old and younger. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Under 29 years old group frames:

Proponents say it would ensure that Medicare provides you at least some health care benefits when you need them because it will prevent the program from going bankrupt.

Opponents say it would reduce your health care benefits at an age you will likely need them and make it difficult for you to pay/budget for your care.

29 year old and older group frames:
Proponents say it would ensure that Medicare provides you full health care benefits when you need them because it will prevent the program from going bankrupt.

Opponents say it would limit what doctors or specialists you could see because it will reduce the number of doctors who accept Medicare patients.

*College aid to immigrant children brought to U.S. illegally*

Control: There has been lots of talk about reforming immigration laws. A new proposal calls for the federal government to offer financial aid to help immigrant children brought to the US illegally pay for college. What best describes your position on this proposal?

Those paying for college/expect to pay group frames:

Proponents say it would create a more diverse and vibrant campus for you/your family member(s) and improve you/your family member’s educational experience.

Opponents say it would make less funding available for you/your family member(s) and increase the cost of college for you/your family member(s).

Those not paying for college group frames:

Proponents say it would help lower your taxes in the coming years because it would strengthen the workforce and lower the cost of welfare programs.

Opponents say paying for the aid would lead to higher taxes for you and reduce the amount of money you have to save or spend.

*Policy Effects.* Respondents were asked: “What effect would the above proposal to raise incomes taxes have on you?” The variables were coded from 0 (extremely negative) to 7 (extremely positive).
**Political Beliefs.** Respondents were asked: “How consistent with your political values and beliefs is the above proposal?” The six-point variable was coded from 0 (completely inconsistent) to 1 (completely consistent).

**Age.** Respondents were asked, “What is your age?” The answer choices were 18-28, 29-39, 40-49, 50-59 and 60 or older. If respondents answered 18-28 they were assigned to the under 29 Medicare reductions group. If respondents answered 29-39, 40-49, 50-59, or 60 or older they were assigned to the over 28 Medicare reductions group.

**Income.** Respondents were asked, “What was the total household income for all members of your family living with you in 2013 before taxes? This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.” The response options were less than or equal to $10,000, $10,001 to $50,000, $50,001 to $100,000, $100,001 to $200,000, and more than $200,000. If respondents answered either less than $10,000 or $10,001 to $50,000 than they were assigned to the under $50,000 tax increase group. If respondents selected $50,001 to $100,000, $100,001 to $200,000 or more than $200,000 they were assigned to the over $200,000 tax increase group.

**Paying for College.** Respondents were asked: “Are you currently helping pay for college for either yourself or a family members?” If respondents answered no to the question, they were asked: “Are you planning to help pay for college for either yourself or a family member in the next few years?” If respondents answered yes to either question they were assigned to the pay for college group, and if they answered no to both questions they were assigned to the not paying for college group.

**Gender.** Respondents were asked, “What is your gender?” Men were coded 1 and female were coded 0.
**Fiscal Ideology.** Respondents were asked, “When it comes to spending and tax issues, do you generally think of yourself as... Extremely Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Somewhat Conservative (or) Extremely Conservative?” The variable was coded from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative).

**Social Ideology.** Respondents were asked, “When it comes to social issues, do you generally think of yourself as... Extremely Liberal, Somewhat Liberal, Slightly Liberal, Moderate, Slightly Conservative, Somewhat Conservative (or) Extremely Conservative?” The variable was coded from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative).

**Partisanship.** Respondents were asked, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a …Strong Republican, Republican, Weak Republican, Independent, Weak Democrat, Democrat, (or) Strong Democrat?” The variable was coded from 1 (Strong Republican) to 7 (Strong Democrat).

**Education.** Respondents were asked, “What is the highest degree or level of education that you have completed?” The responses were coded from 1 (Some high school, but not a high school degree) to 6 (Advanced degree).

**Race.** Respondents were asked, “Are you Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino?” and then were asked, “Which of the following racial groups best describes you?” Based on these questions, the data was coded to include a binary variable for being Latino (coded 1 if Latino and 0 if not Latino), a binary variable for being Asian (coded 1 if Asian and 0 if not Asian), and a binary variable for being Black (coded 1 if black and 0 if not black).
## Appendix XIV – Demographic Statistics for Framing Studies

### Table XXXIV: Population and Participant Demographics for Framing Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>2012 American Community Survey/General Social Survey*</th>
<th>Study 1, Exit Poll</th>
<th>Study 2, Survey 1</th>
<th>Study 2, Survey 2</th>
<th>Study 3, Online Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49.2 percent</td>
<td>48.1 percent</td>
<td>62.9 percent</td>
<td>58.3 percent</td>
<td>58.5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years old and older</td>
<td>46.5 percent</td>
<td>85.1 percent</td>
<td>16.8 percent</td>
<td>20.2 percent</td>
<td>18.8 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74.2 percent</td>
<td>74.7 percent</td>
<td>79.5 percent</td>
<td>81.7 percent</td>
<td>78.6 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12.6 percent</td>
<td>18.5 percent</td>
<td>7.4 percent</td>
<td>5.9 percent</td>
<td>8.5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>16.4 percent</td>
<td>5.9 percent</td>
<td>8.7 percent</td>
<td>6.0 percent</td>
<td>7.5 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>9.3 percent</td>
<td>54.6 percent</td>
<td>47.9 percent</td>
<td>52.1 percent</td>
<td>44.6 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income over $100,000</td>
<td>22.2 percent</td>
<td>36.9 percent</td>
<td>10.0 percent</td>
<td>12.1 percent</td>
<td>10.6 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Republican</td>
<td>31.7 percent</td>
<td>28.7 percent</td>
<td>18.4 percent</td>
<td>18.5 percent</td>
<td>16.3 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Democrat</td>
<td>46.1 percent</td>
<td>45.0 percent</td>
<td>44.7 percent</td>
<td>45.5 percent</td>
<td>45.4 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Independent</td>
<td>19.8 percent</td>
<td>26.3 percent</td>
<td>36.9 percent</td>
<td>36.0 percent</td>
<td>38.3 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Conservative</td>
<td>34.6 percent</td>
<td>32.8 percent</td>
<td>26.9 percent</td>
<td>27.0 percent</td>
<td>31.0 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Liberal</td>
<td>27.0 percent</td>
<td>35.7 percent</td>
<td>50.7 percent</td>
<td>51.7 percent</td>
<td>47.7 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Moderate</td>
<td>38.5 percent</td>
<td>31.4 percent</td>
<td>22.4 percent</td>
<td>21.2 percent</td>
<td>21.3 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The measures for gender, age, race, education and income are based on the 2012 American Community Survey, and the measures of partisanship and ideology are based on the 2012 General Social Survey.
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