CHAPTER 5

The Structure of Political Argument and the Logic of Issue Framing

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Democracy has never been so universally esteemed. Governments, it is true, continue to be headed by kings and the religious elect; the army, the church, landowners, and business still have their hands on the levers of power; and citizens in wide swathes of the world are regularly drowned in waves of despotism, corruption, civil war, and ethnic, religious, and ideological slaughter. Even so, no other pattern of government—monarchical, ecclesiastical, military—now can challenge the legitimacy of democracy as a form of governance. And what is more, the achievement of democracy is not pyrrhic, a triumph of a word or political slogan. A half century ago totalitarian regimes wished to enjoy its prestige and attempted to pass off, particularly on the left, a murderous combination of twentieth-century efficiency and eighteenth-century absolutism as democracy rightly understood. With the collapse of Soviet Russia, this Orwellian inversion has been bleached away. Democracy, it now is near universally agreed, entails a distinctive set of institutions as well as a distinct set of principles—freedom of speech, competition among political parties, constitutional or common law assurances of due process, and equality of citizens under the law, among others.

Yet there is a paradox. At the very time that democracy has won preeminent status as a form of governance, some of its closest students have concluded that citizens are incapable of playing the role assigned them under the modern theory of democracy. To be sure, the limitations of citizens, particularly in exercising informed, principled political judgment, is a well-rubbed theme. But as we mean to make plain, contemporary studies have sharpened, even radicalized, the critique of democratic citizenship.

We begin, therefore, by distinguishing from older and more familiar concerns the new grounds for skepticism that have sprung up from recent research on framing effects. The principal elements of the framing theory of public opinion have been accepted by a remarkable number and range of scholars (e.g., Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 1989; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Zaller 1992) and arguably now constitute the standard position in the study of public opinion. In particular, it now is widely agreed that citizens in large numbers can be readily blown from one side of an issue to

the very opposite depending on how the issue is specifically framed. In turn, the ease with which they can be blown from one side of an issue to the other suggests that the positions they take are far from securely anchored in underlying, enduring principles.

To the best of our knowledge, the validity of framing studies has gone unexamined. It has instead been taken for granted that the logic of these experiments is correct. As we demonstrate, however, the standard design of framing studies is methodologically flawed at its core when applied to politics. And as we also show, when what is wrong methodologically is put right, the substantive conclusion that emerges is very nearly the inverse of the one customarily drawn.

Issue Framing and Citizen Reasoning

The principal lines of the modern critique of citizen reasoning were laid down by Walter Lippmann in his classic work, *Public Opinion* (1922). Citizens, he contended, spend the largest part of their time and energy engaged with concerns about their work, their families, the quality of life in their neighborhoods, the whir of activities of the social, recreational, and charitable groups to which they devote so much time, caught up and carried along by the currents of daily life. The world of public affairs is, by contrast, remote, complex, recondite, and of secondary interest compared to the real and pressing concerns of family, work, and religion. Certainly politics can command their attention, but as a rule only under unusual circumstances—scandals at home, crises abroad—and then only for comparatively brief periods of time. In light of the intermittent and superficial attention that citizens typically pay to politics, it is only natural, Lippmann reasoned, that the ideas that they form of it—the "pictures in their mind"—tend to be crude, oversimplified, and stereotypical.

The first wave of the systematic study of public opinion further reinforced Lippmann's debunking of public opinion. Citizens, as the classic analysis of Berelson and his colleagues drove home,[1] do not follow with attention developments in the world of public affairs, and in any case have only a thin and often unreliable fund of information about politics on which to draw. The foundations for their judgments about politics, it followed, are shallow, and their judgments, in turn, often impulsive, oversimplified, intemperate, ill-considered, and ill-informed, excessively tuned to the immediate and the emotional aspects of public controversies and insufficiently attentive, when attentive at all, to longer-run consequences.

The terms of argument, however, recently have been expanded. On first hearing, this expansion may appear merely to be wringing yet another

chord on a familiar theme; on close examination it will become apparent that the contemporary critique of citizenship has been strikingly sharpened, even radicalized. The thrust of criticism, initially, was that the judgment of citizens on political matters often is ill-considered. But the question that now is under consideration is not whether citizens are judging political matters badly, but instead whether they are capable of political judgment at all—good or bad.

The challenge to citizens' capacity for judgment got underway indirectly. Over a decade ago Gamson and Modigliani introduced a constructionist perspective to the study of media discourse and public opinion.[2] Media discourse, they suggested, consists in interpretive packages, each with an internal structure, each giving meaning to an issue or event in the public domain. At the center of each package, they asserted, "is a central organizing idea, or frame."[3] A frame, by incorporating and condensing a set of "metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, moral appeals, and other symbolic devices," supplies a readily comprehensible basis suggesting both how to think about the issue at hand and how to justify what should be done about it.[4] Gamson and Modigliani go on to present a rich and complex account of the development of media frames as well as the role of frames in shaping public opinion.

It was, however, their conception of "framing effects" in public opinion specifically that sparked interest. In less than a decade a large body of research on framing has been accomplished,[5] and the studies that have been accumulated show a rare degree of agreement with respect to both causal reasoning and empirical results. How citizens think about a public issue, it now is widely if not universally agreed, depends on how it is framed. The notion of framing itself is widely, although not perhaps precisely, agreed on. It can, and frequently is, used in two distinguishable senses that are not, however, always clearly distinguished one from another. Framing effects, in the strict sense, refer to semantically distinct conceptions of exactly the same course of action that induce preference reversals. A classic example is an experiment by Kahneman and Tversky (1984) on the impact of framing on patients' decisions whether to undergo a surgical procedure. They show that experimental subjects are markedly more likely to agree to a surgery if they are told that ninety-five out of a hundred patients survive the procedure as opposed to being told that five out of a hundred die from it. It is worth emphasizing that what is crucial, from this perspective, is that people will make strikingly different decisions whether to follow one course of action even if the alternative characterizations of the choice before them are strictly equivalent in terms of expected utility.

It is difficult to satisfy this requirement of interchangeability of alternatives outside of a narrow range of choices. Certainly when it comes to the

form in which alternatives are presented to citizens making political choices, it rarely is possible to establish ex ante that the gains (or losses) of alternative characterizations of a course of action are strictly equivalent. It accordingly should not be surprising that the concept of framing, for the study of political choices, typically refers to characterizations of a course of action in terms of an alternative "central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events."[6]

What does it mean to refer to a "central organizing idea or story line" that gives meaning to a political issue? An example from the studies of Zaller will make this plain. How citizens think about the issue of oil drilling, he observes, varies depending on whether they confront the issue in the context of a concern over American dependency on foreign energy sources or, alternatively, the economic costs of a failure to develop new energy sources—higher gas prices and unemployment, for example.[7] The relaxed conception of a "framing" effect is thus distinguished from the strict by the elision of the requirement of strict interchangeability of the expected utility of alternative characterizations of a course of action.

Based on the last decade of research on framing effects on public opinion, there now is a consensus that the way an issue is framed matters for how citizens think about political issues. As Nelson and Kinder observe, "[F]rames are constructions of the issue: they spell out the essence of the problem."[8] Frames are thus not reducible simply to an argument on one or another side of an issue. They are broader, suggesting, as Nelson and Kinder go on to remark, "[h]ow it should be thought about, and may go so far as to recommend what (if anything) should be done."[9] What is more, a frame characteristically is not narrowly tied to a unique course of action but, as Gamson and Modigliani stipulate at the outset, "typically implies a range of positions, rather than any single one."[10]

The framing of political choice, it is further agreed, may matter in either of two quite different ways. Citizens may, depending on how an issue is framed, take a position for different reasons. Or they may, again depending on how it is framed, take different positions. The first kind of framing effect may be of importance from a social psychological perspective, but it is of secondary interest from a political perspective, since it does not alter the balance of opinion on an issue. By contrast, the second kind of framing effect results in preference reversals, altering the political balance of opinion on an issue, even (and to judge from previous research, not infrequently) converting the minority position on an issue into the majority one.[11] Accordingly, when we speak of framing effects we shall have in mind situations when the position that citizens take on an issue and the reasons they take it vary as a function of the characterization of the alternatives open for choice.

A final point is important to spell out. Not only is there agreement that how an issue is framed affects how citizens think about it, but there is also consensus on how the framing of an issue affects how they think about it. Ambivalence is the key. Just so far as citizens simultaneously have reasons both to support a course of action and to oppose it, that is, just so far as they are ambivalent, they will be susceptible to framing effects. The reasoning is straightforward. In making a choice about a public policy issue—in deciding, for example, whether government spending should do more to help blacks overcome problems of poverty and discrimination or, alternatively, blacks should do more to help themselves—citizens take account of relevant reasons: "considerations" in the lingo. Citizens, on this view, have a store of considerations that they can take account of in making up their mind whether to support or oppose a possible course of action. As a long string of scholars have argued,[12] the more consistent their stock of considerations, the more likely they are to make a choice consistent with them. At the limit, if every consideration that they could take account of favors government action, they should in all circumstances support it, and vice versa. On the other hand, the more evenly balanced their considerations, the less likely they are to offer a univocal guide for making a choice. Indeed, at the limit, when citizens' considerations are evenly balanced, as many arguing against government action as for it, they will find themselves up in the air, unable on their own to choose between alternatives, in the position of Baalim's ass, caught equidistant between two bales of equally attractive hay, starving because he is unable to decide which to eat.

How do people make choices about matters of public affairs when they find themselves in this kind of fix, more or less equally divided in the number and strength of reasons to favor and to oppose a policy? How do they decide to rely on one set of reasons rather than the other? From the perspective of framing studies, attention and salience are pivotal. Whether people attend to considerations that favor a policy or oppose it, when they have both on hand, is a function of where their attention is directed just before they choose; and where their attention is directed just before they choose is a function of their immediate circumstances, particularly (in public opinion interviews, which have been the principal theater for studies of issue framing) the wording and sequencing of the questions put to them. Just so far as their attention is directed to the positive considerations they hold on a given matter of public policy, people will be inclined to give a thumbs up. However, as long as their attention is directed to the negative considerations they also hold about it, they will be inclined to give a thumbs down. As Zaller puts it, "Which of a person's attitudes is expressed at different times depends on which has been made most immediately salient by chance and the details of questionnaire construction, especially

the order and framing of questions."[13] Or, as Nelson and Kinder, citing Chong and Hochschild for support, put the point: just so far as citizens hold considerations that contradict one another, it leaves them "confused and conflicted about where to stand. . . . Frames help to resolve this confusion by declaring which of the many considerations is relevant and important, and which should be given less attention."[14] In short, the weaker the consistency of the pool of considerations that citizens take account of in making a choice about an issue in politics, the stronger the framing effect. We call this the "consistency" premise.

This is the logic, briefly rehearsed, of the framing theory of public opinion. By itself the reasoning seems to us unexceptionable. But taken just by itself, it leaves the framing theory underidentified in two crucial respects. When are citizens likely to find themselves divided in their own mind about the policy alternative to support? Does this happen principally, perhaps even exclusively, for political concerns—say, the right policy to strike with respect to a little-known country—that tend to be transient, remote, unfamiliar, of negligible interest to the larger public? Or do citizens find themselves up in the air, caught between equally persuasive policy alternatives, even when it comes to the major issues of the day? And who is likely to find themselves in this situation? A relatively small portion of the public, perhaps those who are least engaged by public affairs and therefore least well-informed about them? Or a larger, more politically consequential segment?

The answer to all of these questions, according to proponents of the framing theory of public opinion, is: most of the public are up in the air about most political issues. As Zaller and Feldman put it, "[M]ost people possess opposing considerations on most issues that might lead them to decide the issue either way."[15] Not everyone, Zaller acknowledges, "[i]s ambivalent to the same degree,"[16] but the "majority of persons on the majority of issues"[17] "possess numerous, frequently inconsistent considerations,"[18] and their views on most questions of public interest accordingly are "unfocused and contradictory.[19] These two distributional assumptions—that the ideas of the "majority of persons on the majority of issues" are contradictory—coupled with the logic of the framing hypothesis have produced a transformation in the standard representation of political reasoning of the ordinary citizen. A generation ago, Converse supposed that the problem was that citizens, having given political issues little thought, often had no real thoughts about them. According to the new critique of citizenship, however, the difficulty is not that people have too few ideas to call upon, but that they have too many and they point in opposing directions rather than pointing to none. To borrow the formulation of Nelson and Kinder, the idea that "citizens are almost always in possession of a variety of considerations that might all plausibly bear on any particular issue" and

that "many of these considerations may contradict one another, leaving citizens often confused and conflicted about where to stand" is now a—perhaps even *the*—standard position in the study of public opinion.[20]

Why do so many citizens find themselves, on so many issues, armed with reasons to both favor and oppose any given course of action? On the classic line of reasoning advanced by Lippmann and others, their views on politics so often are muddled, rigid, and formulaic to an excess because they are prone to oversimplify, because they find it difficult to see the connections among ideas and to make out the larger patterns of political argument; in a word, because they "morselize," to borrow Robert Lane's classic characterization.[21] The new line of argument is externalist, not internalist, focusing on the characteristics of political communication, not those of citizens. So Zaller argues that citizens wind up with reasons to favor and to oppose policies not because they have failed to attend to politics, but precisely because they have, and "in an environment that carries roughly evenly balanced communications on both sides of issues, people are likely to internalize many contradictory arguments, which is to say, they are likely to form considerations that induce them both to favor and to oppose the same issues."[22] Let us call this the "communication premise."

Given the consistency and communication premises, only one more step is necessary to complete the framing theory of public opinion—the role of elites. Just so far as citizens find themselves up in the air, ready to vote thumbs up or thumbs down, the intervention of elites is pivotal. As Nelson and Kinder declare, "[E]lites wage a war of frames because they know that if their frame becomes the dominant way of thinking about a particular problem, then the battle for public opinion has been won."[23] There is a deep irony in this elite-driven account of public opinion. Gamson and Modigliani, the originators of framing theory, deliberately proposed a two-track account of the media and of public opinion, expressly disavowing a media-driven account of public opinion.[24] The unfolding logic of the framing theory of public opinion, however, has turned their position nearly on its head. It is now an unqualifiedly externalist account of political choice. The established views, sentiments, political orientations, or values of citizens count for little; the role of elites in defining the meaning of an issue, in imposing "the dominant way of thinking about a particular problem," counts for all. This is the claim, both empirical and normative, that we want to examine.

For data we shall rely on the second wave of the Multi-Investigator Survey. The Multi-Investigator is specifically designed to offer a general purpose platform, accessible to investigators and research teams across the country who wish to combine the internal validity strengths of randomized experimentation with the external validity strengths of random sampling. The sample is a random digit dial (RDD) selection of the adult population of the country as a whole.[25]

To work through the logic of the framing theory of public opinion, we shall proceed in two steps. First, we shall show that our procedures and data reproduce the classic framing effect. Then, taking advantage of computer-assisted interviewing to break out of the excessively restrictive corset of the classic split-ballot design, we shall show that analysis of an appropriately designed experiment reverses nearly completely both the causal and normative conclusions to draw on the efficacy of citizen reasoning about contested political issues (n = 1,056).

Contestability and the Dynamics of Issue Framing: A Theoretical Perspective

To understand how citizens make political choices about matters on the public agenda, we shall argue that it is necessary to take account of the distinctive feature of politics as the domain of choice.

Politics in a democratic society is distinctively the domain in which choices are contestable legitimately. Some of the reasons that political choices are contestable are common to choices generally.[26] There are, for example, limits on information at hand and hence disagreement over the considerations to take into account; or even where there is agreement over the considerations to take into account, there may be disagreement over the weight to attach to them; or even where there is agreement on the principles and standards to be applied, disagreement may follow from their inherent vagueness; or even where there is agreement on the interpretation of standards, there may be disagreements over assessment and interpretation of the "facts of the matter" because of differences in people's life experiences and circumstances. But, above and beyond all of these sources of disagreement, in democratic politics political preferences are contestable because choices necessarily must be made between competing values. Previous work has traced out the implications of the inherent contestability of political choices for (i) systematic cleavages between political elites (as opposed to between elites and mass publics) for issues of civil liberties and civil rights (Sniderman et al. 1996); (ii) openings for new coalitions in the contemporary politics of race (Sniderman and Carmines 1997); (iii) the ecology of issue argumentation (Sniderman and Gould 1997; Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000); and (iv) the institutional organization of choice spaces (Sniderman 1999; Jackman and Sniderman 1999). Here we wish to take another step and consider the link between the logic of issue framing and the dynamics of political argument.

Again our starting point is value conflict. The substance of political problems, by their very nature, requires choices be made between com-

peting values—between, to cite an off-the-rack example, strengthening order and broadening the area of individual freedom. To have more of one means to have less of the other. But it also is the nature of politics that choices between colliding values are not made merely at the individual level. Given the logic of electoral competition and the substance of political problems, political parties and the candidates who run under their banner tend to commit themselves to one or the other of opposing values (Jackman and Sniderman 2002).

Just so far as political parties distinguish themselves by publicly pledging themselves to opposing values, three implications follow from the logic of electoral competition. First, political parties and candidates are not free to frame issues however they would wish. The party that puts itself forward as the guardian of order is constrained to make use of electoral appeals that are consistent with its commitment to order; the party that puts itself forward as the advocate of civil liberties is similarly constrained by its commitment to civil rights. It follows that frames, alternative ways of defining the meaning of issues, are not exogenous to political competition; they are endogenous to it. Second, just so far as it is in the interest of political parties to frame issues in a way that will appeal to established points of view with a wide following, citizens will tend to have preferences about the right way that an issue should be framed for exactly the same reasons that they tend to have preferences about how issues should be dealt with. Third, just so far as political parties contest an issue, citizens are exposed to alternative ways of defining its meaning and therefore have, thanks to electoral competition, a choice as to how they may think about it.

All three are necessary premises of a properly political theory of public opinion, but it is the second and third that bear most directly on the study of framing effects. In the first instance, any particular frame is not equally persuasive to all citizens. Some will find the particular metaphors and moral appeals invoked more compelling, others less, depending on their point of view. A person who attaches a higher priority to equality than to individual achievement will find the framing of affirmative action as "leveling the playing field" more compelling than one who has the reverse set of priorities. And in the second instance, citizens are not exposed to just one set of "metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, moral appeals, and other symbolic devices," suggesting how to think about the issue at hand and how to justify what should be done about it. Just so far as there is political competition over the issue, there will be public competition over which frame is most appropriate. But framing studies, to our knowledge without exception, have neglected the fact that frames are themselves contestable. They have instead restricted attention to situations in which citizens are artificially sequestered, restricted to hearing only one way of thinking

about a political issue. But if our argument is correct, it is essential to consider how citizens will react when they are exposed, as in real politics they characteristically are, to opposing ways to think about an issue. What our findings will show is that when the logical limitation of the standard design of framing experiments is corrected, rather than citizens' being easily blown off course by political debate, the clash of political argument increases the chances that they will anchor their specific choices in underlying principles.

The "Government Spending" Experiment

Our concern is whether, and under what conditions, citizens can make principled judgments as to what government should and shouldn't do in the face of efforts to constrain their choices by framing issues in dispute. But which issues should we examine?

In the study of framing effects, the selection of issues has been higgledy-piggledy, without consideration ex ante of the principles properly governing the choice of issues to examine. There have, for example, been studies of attitudes toward the Contras in Nicaragua (Zaller 1992) and attitudes toward affirmative action (Kinder and Sanders 1990), but manifestly the former is an example of a political issue that is uncommonly obscure, and hence raises the suspicion that framing effects are too easy to demonstrate, while the latter obviously is an example of an issue that is exceptionally charged, and hence raises the opposing suspicion that framing effects may be too hard to demonstrate.[27] We shall instead concentrate on issues with three characteristics. They are (1) of major importance; (2) longstanding; and (3) competitively contested.

A paradigmatic example is government activism on behalf of those who are badly off. This is an issue contested in all contemporary democracies, and candidates and parties competing for public office attempt to frame it to their advantage. The terrain is well explored. The opposing sides have worked through the inventory of formulations of the issue, learning through trial and error the appeals and organizing ideas that best work to their advantage. On one side there is the appeal to opportunity and compassion, the idea that what is at stake is taking advantage of the government to see that those who are badly off get opportunities to become better off. On the other side there is the appeal to the costs that social welfare policies impose and the idea that what is at stake is that those who have worked hard and made their own way will be worse off so that those who have not should be better off.

Alternative Frames: The Standard Design

The design of the "government spending" experiment is more complex than we initially are going to suggest, but we wish to begin with two of its core conditions, which match exactly the standard design of framing experiments. In one of the two, a randomly selected set of respondents were asked:

> Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people *so they can have a better chance of getting ahead in life*?

We shall call this the "getting ahead" frame. In the other, a randomly selected set of respondents were asked:

> Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people, *even if it means higher taxes*?

We shall call this the "higher taxes" frame.

Notice that in both conditions the issue is the same: whether government spending should be increased to increase opportunities for the poor. All that is varied is the symbolic appeal in terms of which the issue is framed. In addition, we measured respondents' commitment to a relevant principle that they would bring to bear if, in making a decision about governmental efforts on behalf of the poor, they were to make a judgment on the basis of principle. And if citizens were to choose their position on the issue of government spending on behalf of the poor on the basis of principle, what would serve as a point of anchorage? Equality surely is a relevant principle. The more importance that people attach to those who are badly off becoming better off, the more likely they should be to support increased government spending to increase opportunities for the poor. But how can one tell how much importance people attach to the value of equality, since nearly all principles or values, very much including equality, are of importance to most people?

It is better, we suggest, to assess how they feel about a value not in isolation from other values, but in direct competition with them. Specifically, the way to tell whether people truly hold to a value like equality is to see whether, if they are forced to make a choice between it and a rival value, they choose it. Accordingly, we said to respondents:

> Now here are some values that everyone agrees are important. But sometimes we have to choose one value over another. If you absolutely had to choose between each of the following two values, which is more important.

Then, as one of the set of competing values, we asked:

> How about narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor OR increasing economic growth.

If policy choices about government activism on behalf of the poor are grounded in underlying political principles, then those who choose the value of narrowing the gap between the rich and poor should be more likely to support activist government on behalf of the poor; those who instead choose the value of economic growth should be more likely to oppose it.

Table 5.1 summarizes the choices respondents make as to whether government should increase opportunities for the poor under the pressure of the standard "alternative framing" design. Since the purpose of these experiments is to determine whether, if the organizing idea attached to an issue is systematically varied, the positions that citizens tend to take will correspondingly vary, in one condition the issue is "framed" in a way to increase support in favor of a course of government action; in the other, to reduce it. The first column of Table 5.1 accordingly reports the levels of support for government action on behalf of the poor. For simplicity, opposition to government action is scored 0, support for it 1. Since the choice is dichotomous, the mean equals the proportion.

The impact of framing, Table 5.1 suggests, is dramatic. Look at the responses of those who, if required to choose, judge that equality is more important than economic growth. When the issue of government action is framed in a way congruent with their general orientation, to call attention to increasing opportunity to get ahead, an overwhelming majority—87 percent—support increased government spending to help the poor, just as they logically should given their preference for equality. However, when the very same matter of policy is framed in a way counter to their general orientation, to call attention to the consequence of higher taxes, the overwhelming majority in support of government action evaporates, and a majority—albeit a bare majority of 52 percent, oppose increased government spending to help the poor.

The story is the same for those whose general view is just the other way around—that is, those who, if required to choose, judge that economic growth is more important than equality. When the issue of government action is framed in a way congruent with their general orientation, to call attention to the consequence of higher taxes, a majority of them—58 percent—oppose the policy, just as they logically should given their preference for economic growth. However, when the policy is framed in a way counter to their general orientation, to call attention to increasing opportunities to get ahead, this majority melts away and the larger number of them—64 percent—support rather than oppose increased government

TABLE 5.1
Support for Government Spending on the Poor as a Function of "Standard Alternative" Framing and Commitment to Equality or to Economic Growth

	"Higher Taxes" Frame	*"Getting Ahead" Frame*
Egalitarians (n = 191)	.48	.87[a]
Economic growth proponents (n = 343)	.42	.64[a]

[a] The difference between the two frames is statistically significant ($p < .05$).
Data from the Multi-Investigator II

spending for the poor. It appears that whoever controls how an issue is framed controls its outcome, with a majority voting thumbs up or down on greater government spending to assist the poor depending on whether the issue is framed in terms of enlarging opportunity or imposing higher taxes. In a word, a classic framing effect.

COMPETING FRAME

Our results thus reproduce the results of previous studies, and just because of this convergence, we are in a position to extend the analysis of framing beyond them. For the pivotal question is not the reality of "framing effects"—they have too often been confirmed—but their meaning. How should the apparent variability of opinion as a function of the framing of an issue be understood?

One way of searching for an answer is take the problem to be primarily a psychological one. On this approach, the step to take is to identify a psychological mechanism or property that makes intelligible the choice behavior of citizens. Historically, this is the path framing studies have taken, focusing on ambivalence in particular, accounting for the observed variability of choices by invoking a state of simultaneous commitment to opposing lines of public policy. What we are trying to understand, however, is political behavior, and without discounting the value of a psychological approach, we think a political one takes priority.

Consider, then, the problem of framing from a political perspective. In real politics opposing sides contest issues, and part of that contest is competing to frame issues, to define their meaning, to establish how they should be thought about. So one side insists that assuring equal treatment, for example, requires establishing a level playing field and therefore affirmatively assisting minorities, while the other side maintains that assuring

equal treatment means, on the contrary, treating everybody the same. And both sides barrage the public, so far as they have the means to do so, to accept their way of framing the issue as the right way of framing it.

This process of argumentation, however, is just what is missing from framing studies. In the established design, respondents are presented with either one organizing idea or its rival, but they never confront both at the same time. Yet in real politics, just so far as issues are contested, voters cannot be sequestered and their attention cannot be restricted to one, and only one, view of how the issues in dispute should be thought about. On the contrary, just so far as competing sides contend to win public support for their position, citizens are exposed to opposing views—indeed, their attention often is caught by the clash of argument—and are in a position to evaluate the merits of alternative ways of framing an issue.

To capture what actually happens in politics, it is necessary to have an additional condition in framing experiments, in which opposing frames are presented together. The "government spending" experiment was accordingly designed to have not only the standard two conditions, in which either a frame designed to invoke a positive response or one designed to invoke a negative one is presented, but also a third condition, in which both positive and negative frames ("getting ahead" and "higher taxes") are presented.

The crucial question politically is how readily citizens can be deflected from their political principles by a counterargument when they encounter it not in isolation but in the course of political debate when the contentions of opposing sides are being voiced. Table 5.2 therefore contrasts the reactions of respondents in the "dual frame" condition and in the "counterframe" condition. In addition, because persuasability can be a function of political sophistication, Table 5.2 also presents responses in the counterframe and dual frame conditions as a function of levels of political knowledge.[28]

Two points stand out. First, and consistent with previous research, the better informed citizens are about politics, the more likely their choices are to be consistent with their underlying principles; this is true regardless of the experimental condition they find themselves in. For example, in the counterframe condition, among those judging equality to be more important than economic growth, support for increased government spending to assist the poor marches up from 37 percent among the least informed, to 54 percent among the middle, to 62 percent among the most informed; in the dual frame condition, among those judging economic growth to be more important than equality, opposition to increased government spending correspondingly and all together appropriately drops from 67 percent among the least informed, to 51 percent among the middle, to 39 percent among the most informed. Second, and notwithstanding the first result, the effect of hearing opposing sides of a political argument is to increase, not decrease, the likelihood that specific choices will be consistent with vot-

TABLE 5.2
Support for Government Spending on the Poor as a Function of Counter and Dual Framing, Political Information, and Commitment to Equality or to Economic Growth

	Egalitarian				
	Political Information				
	Low	*Medium*	*High*	*Total*	
Counterframe	.37[a]	.54	.62[a]	.48	(n = 94)
Dual frame	.66[a]	.71	.85a	.72	(n = 80)
	Economic Growth Proponents				
	Political Information				
	Low	*Medium*	*High*	*Total*	
Counterframe	.86[a]	.60	.49[a]	.64	(n = 174)
Dual frame	.67[a]	.51	.39[a]	.54	(n = 173)

[a] The difference between the low political information respondents and the high political information respondents is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Data from the Multi-Investigator II

ers' underlying principles. This is especially so for those who favor equality: in the counterframe condition, they divide approximately fifty-fifty over increased government spending for the poor; by contrast, in the dual frame condition, they support it by approximately three in every four. In short, being exposed to opposing sides of an argument increases consistency among decisions taken on specific policies and underlying principles.

Consistency comes in many forms, and it is important here to distinguish between absolute and relative conceptions. Relatively, even the least informed are more consistent in the dual frame condition than in the contrary frame; absolutely, the position of those who favor economic growth is indistinguishable from that of those who favor equality. Indeed, an absolute majority of those whose general orientation is conservative, favoring economic growth over narrowing the gap between rich and poor, favor a liberal position on the issue of government spending for the poor. It would be a mistake, however, to make too much of absolute levels of consistency in policy positions. Measurement is at the ordinal level; and in any case the magnitude of effects observed is tied to the specific manipulations. Certainly, it has proven costly politically for liberals to underestimate the strength of arguments on the conservative side of the issue of government spending.

And there is a potentially far-reaching implication to draw from the results in Table 5.2. The lesson regularly drawn from the framing studies is that whoever controls the framing of an issue controls the political outcome. Frame a policy so as to favor a positive response and a majority of the public is likely to favor it; frame it so as to favor a negative response and a majority is likely to oppose it. The results in Table 5.2 suggest a different lesson. When citizens are exposed to a complete rather than an edited version of political debate, they do not succumb to ambivalence or fall into confusion. On the contrary, even though as part of the process of debate they are exposed to an argument at odds with their general orientation, they tend "to go home," to pick out the side of the issue that fits their deeper-lying political principles. This suggests that political argument, when it takes its full form rather than the stilted one of standard framing experiments, may facilitate rather than distort consistency in political reasoning, and it may facilitate political reasoning, the "government spending" experiment suggests, whether citizens are well-informed or not about politics.

Congruent Arguments and the Absence of Arguments

In order to draw up a complete balance sheet, identifying the costs as well as the benefits when opposing sides directly clash, it is necessary to explore more fully the logical space of possibilities. To this point we have contrasted the impact of counterarguments presented in isolation and accompanied by a congruent argument. But what characterizes the daily lives of many citizens is the absence of challenges to their political beliefs and practices. Similarity of belief, according to classical studies of social life (e.g., Berelson 1964), marks a number of domains of belief, very much including politics. To borrow American examples, a Republican husband is more likely to have a Republican spouse, a Democratic wife to have a Democratic spouse, and both couples to have politically consonant friends than the other way around.

A tendency to like-mindedness in politics is only a tendency. Most people are exposed, in some aspect of their social lives, to some differences of view, if not in their homes then at their jobs. In any case all are at risk of having their established opinions challenged by dissonant opinions just so far as they are exposed to the mass media. Still, so far as the streams of opinion to which people are exposed in their everyday encounters are biased, the bias is in favor of their own outlook. It follows that to gauge the costs and benefits of political argument, it is necessary to estimate the likelihood that citizens can make issue choices consistent with their general orientation when they find themselves exposed only to arguments congruent with it.

If exposure to a congruent argument makes a difference, it is perfectly obvious that the difference it makes is to increase the consistency of issue

choices. It is, however, very far from obvious how much of an advantage people gain from a homogenous political environment, or differently put, how much of a disadvantage they suffer from being exposed to genuine political argument, where opposing sides of an issue get a hearing. And we should be left with quite different impressions of the costs of political argument depending on whether the difference between the two circumstances is large or small.

Encountering only arguments you already agree with is one benchmark to gauge the impact of hearing opposing sides being voiced in political debate. And we should like to suggest another. If we are to gauge the impact of political argument on the capacity of citizens to make issue choices consistent with their political principles, it is necessary to consider the consistency of their issue choices when there is no effort to frame an issue. If they are no less capable of picking out the side of the issue that matches their political principles when they are exposed to a full debate, which necessarily involves their being exposed to arguments at odds with their general views, than if they are not exposed to any arguments whatever, they would show themselves to be capable of holding their course even in the crosswinds of political argument.

The "government spending" experiment was designed to encompass the full quartet of possibilities—positive argument, negative argument, both positive and negative arguments—and, what is relevant here, a default condition where neither positive nor negative arguments are presented. Table 5.3 accordingly summarizes responses to the issue of government spending as a function of whether respondents get to hear both sides of an argument, only the side that fits their general view of the matter, or no argument whatever, pro or con.

How much of an advantage is it to hear only arguments you already agree with as opposed to being exposed to opposing sides of a policy debate? Table 5.3 shows there plainly is an advantage judged by belief system

TABLE 5.3
Support for Government Spending on the Poor as a Function of Alternative Framing Forms and Commitment to Equality or to Economic Growth

	Congruent Frame	*Dual Frame*	*Default*
Egalitarians (n = 264)	.87[a]	.72	.83[a]
Economic growth proponents (n = 501)	.42[a]	.54	.62[b]

[a] The difference from the dual frame is significant ($p < .05$).
[b] The difference from the dual frame is insignificant ($p > .05$).
Data from the Multi-Investigator II

constraint.[29] Hearing only their side of the issue, those who favor equality over economic growth are more likely to support increased government spending for the poor; equivalently, hearing only *their* side of the issue, those who favor economic growth over equality are more likely to oppose increased government spending. But of course it cannot be a surprise that citizens are more consistent in the choices they make if they are not exposed to dissonant information. What is a surprise—certainly it was to us—is the comparative modesty of the difference between the congruent and the dual frame conditions: for those who favor equality, it is .15; for those who favor economic growth, .12—a statistically significant effect, but not a politically transforming one. And if it is suggested that a ceiling effect may constrain the difference between the two conditions for those who favor equality, it is clear that no comparable floor effect is constraining the magnitude of change for those who favor economic growth.

Meshing issue choices with underlying principles is only one aspect of political competence, and a democratic polity where citizens never find their established ideas challenged would undercut the openness of argument and exchange of views that a democratic politics demands. But if the objective is to gauge how far citizens are deflected off course politically by the presentation of opposing points of view, the standard that gives the largest estimates of the costs of debate are the choices citizens would make if exposed only to a congruent argument. Yet even measured against that standard, although a price is paid for political debate, the "government spending" experiment shows that it is very far from disabling. And how do the costs and benefits of political debate appear when assessed against the absence of argumentation altogether? Just so far as the process of debate necessarily entails the airing of opposing views, it has the potential to deflect ordinary citizens. It seemed to us, accordingly, that consistency of underlying principles and issue choices should be higher in the default condition than in the dual frame condition.

As Table 5.3 shows, the differences in consistency levels are neither large in size nor themselves consistent in direction. Those who favor equality do appear to be more consistent in the default condition. However, just the opposite is the case for those who favor economic growth: they are more, not less, likely to pick the side of the issue of government spending congruent with their general orientation when opposing frames are presented than when neither the positive nor the negative frame is presented.

These apparently inconsistent results suggest, we believe, an interesting conclusion. In designing the "government spending" experiment, we conceived of the default condition, where neither frame is presented, as involving an absence of argumentation altogether. But this patently is not the case. As the means in the default condition testify, the policy so characterized elicits support of the overwhelming number of those who favor

equality and, still more tellingly, the support of the largest number of those who favor economic growth. A frame can be a sufficient condition to define the meaning of an issue. But it is not a necessary one. Issues can be meaningful even in the absence of a "frame." To put the issue of government spending before respondents, as it is formulated, as an effort "to increase opportunities for poor people," is to put an argument to them.

The "government spending" experiment thus suggests a number of lessons, above all, that citizens not only can stand up and hold to their values in the face of political argument but that the voicing of opposing arguments may even assist them in translating their political attitudes into positions on specific issues. This is a lesson which, if true, is worth learning. But only a limited amount of weight can be put on the results of one experiment. Replication is the strongest test of the reliability of a result.

The "Rally" Experiment

Given the importance we attach to testing ideas using observations independent of the ones that suggested them, we committed ourselves in advance to designing and carrying out a parallel experiment to test the results of the first experiment. Accordingly a replication experiment was deliberately built in to the Multi-Investigator study.

The second experiment explores citizens' judgments about freedom of expression. Specifically, the purpose of the "rally" experiment is to see how citizens respond to the competing claims of maintaining order and safety on the one side and of supporting free speech on the other. Accordingly, in one condition, a randomly selected set of respondents were told:

> This question is about a group that has very extreme political views. Suppose they wanted to hold a public rally to express their ideas. *Given the importance of free speech* would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally?

We shall call this the "free speech" condition.

In another experimental condition, a randomly selected set of respondents were told:

> This question is about a group that has very extreme political views. Suppose they wanted to hold a public rally to express their ideas. *Given the risk of violence* would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally?

We shall call this the "violent risk" condition. Since the issue deals with the collision between promoting freedom of expression and avoiding violence, to assess respondents' general orientation we presented them with a choice between, on the one side, "guaranteeing law and order in society," and,

TABLE 5.4
Support for Public Rally of an Extreme Group as a Function of "Standard Alternative" Framing and Commitment to Individual Freedom or to Law and Order

	"Violent Risk" Frame	*"Free Speech" Frame*
Individual freedom adherents (n = 210)	.53	.89[a]
Law and order adherents (n = 317)	.37	.81[a]

[a] The difference between the two frames is statistically significant ($p < .05$).
Data from the Multi-Investigator II

on the other, "guaranteeing individual freedom." If policy choices about permitting public rallies are grounded in deeper political values, then those who are in favor of guaranteeing individual freedom should be more likely to allow a group with extreme political views to hold a public rally, while those who are in favor of guaranteeing law and order in society should be more likely to oppose it.

Again we begin with the standard design of framing experiments, in which randomly selected sets of respondents are presented with an issue deliberately framed in a way either to increase support for a possible course of action or, alternatively, to reduce it. The first column of Table 5.4 accordingly reports the levels of support for a group with extreme views being allowed to hold a public rally treated as a dichotomous choice and scored 0 or 1—the "violent risk" condition is in the first column; the second column shows the level of support in the "free speech" condition similarly scaled.

Finally, since we are interested in the extent to which citizens draw on their general orientations or political values in making specific choices, the table reports the extent to which a willingness to approve a public rally is conditional on whether respondents attach greater importance to the value of individual freedom or to guaranteeing law and order in society.

The analysis here deliberately parallels the standard design of framing studies, contrasting reactions when the issue in dispute is presented as framed in a way either to evoke support or, alternatively, to provoke opposition. And as Table 5.4 shows, the results of the "rally" experiment match the standard results of framing experiments. When the issue of allowing a rally is framed in terms of the importance of free speech, an overwhelming majority—four out of every five—is in favor. What is more, a decisive majority is in favor whether they attach greater importance to guaranteeing law and order in society or guaranteeing individual freedom, though the majority is slightly larger among the latter than the former. By contrast, when the issue of permitting a rally for a group with very extreme views is framed in terms of "the risk of violence," the balance of opinion

changes: among those who attach a greater priority to guaranteeing law and order, 63 percent are opposed to allowing the rally, while among those who attach a greater priority to individual freedom, support drops from nearly 90 percent to no better than approximately fifty-fifty.

It again appears that you can get large numbers of ordinary citizens to swing around from one side of an issue to the opposite notwithstanding the principled positions they ostensibly have staked depending on how it is framed. But we have argued that this impression that issue preferences are characteristically pliable is artifactual, a function of examining how citizens make choices when they are artificially sequestered and their attention restricted to only one side of a public issue. In the real world of politics, those who are competing for public support strive to frame issues to their advantage. And just so far as there is competition over how issues should be framed, ordinary citizens tend to be exposed to competing frames.

In the "government spending" experiment we saw that when citizens are simultaneously exposed to competing frames (rather than being artificially confined to only one), they are far more likely to make issue choices that are consistent with their underlying principles. This result, if reliable, impeaches the apparent implication of framing studies that the balance of opinion can be tipped in one or another direction depending on how an issue is framed. But how reliable is it? The "rally" experiment, which is focused on a different issue domain and employs altogether different measures, provides an independent opportunity to assess the robustness of this result.

Table 5.5 contrasts the choices that citizens make if the issue is framed in a way that is at odds with their basic political orientation—the counterframe condition—or if they simultaneously are exposed to competing ways of framing the issue—the dual frame condition. As before, in assessing the extent to which they draw on their basic values in making decisions about specific issues, we take account of both their general orientation toward the claims of order versus freedom and their level of political information.

Consider first the responses of those who, as a general matter, prefer freedom to order. They are markedly more likely to take the side of the issue consistent with their general political orientation when they hear both sides of the argument: the proportion choosing consistently goes from 53 percent in the counterframe condition to 75 percent in the dual frame condition. Nor is the gain from being able to hear opposing sides confined to, or even concentrated among, the most politically aware and sophisticated. On the contrary, in this instance political argument most facilitates the reasoning of the least well-informed.[30] Thus, only 30 percent of the least well-informed who profess to value freedom over order support the right of a group with extreme views to hold a public rally if they hear only the opposite side of the argument (the counterframe condition). By contrast, if they hear both sides (the dual frame condition), 84 percent support it.

TABLE 5.5
Support for Public Rally of an Extreme Group as a Function of Counter- and Dual Framing, Political Information, and Commitment to Individual Freedom or to Law and Order

	Individual Freedom Adherents				
	Political Information				
	Low	*Medium*	*High*	*Total*	
Counterframe	.30[a]	.51	.82[a]	.53	(n = 98)
Dual frame	.84[b]	.66	.76[b]	.75	(n = 78)
	Law and Order Adherents				
	Political Information				
	Low	*Medium*	*High*	*Total*	
Counterframe	.88[a]	.79	.76[a]	.81	(n = 162)
Dual frame	.42[b]	.44	.56[b]	.46	(n = 163)

[a] The difference between the low political information respondents and the high political information respondents is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

[b] The difference between the low political information respondents and the high political information respondents is statistically insignificant ($p > .05$).

Data from the Multi-Investigator II

The pattern, moreover, is the same for those who attach a greater importance to law and order. Among the least well-informed, when they have a chance to hear only the opposite side of the argument (the counterframe condition), the overwhelming majority—88 percent—supports the right of a group with extreme views to hold a public rally. By contrast, when they can hear both sides (the dual frame condition), a clear majority—58 percent—opposes it. The same pattern holds, as inspection of Table 5.5 shows, for all levels of political information.

The results of the "rally" experiment thus replicate those of the "government spending" experiment on the crucial point at issue. Both show that when citizens can hear the clash of political argument the positions they take on specific issues are markedly more likely to be grounded in their underlying principles. Moreover, the results of the "rally" experiment also replicate those of the "government spending" experiment on both of the other standards of comparison. As Table 5.6 shows, although respondents are more likely to make a consistent issue choice in the congruent frame condition, the choices that they make differ only modestly (and, indeed, in the case of those who favor law and order do not differ significantly) from those that they make in the dual frame condition. In a word, hearing the other side of an argument does extract a price, but it is a small one.

TABLE 5.6
Support for Public Rally of an Extreme Group as a Function of Alternative Framing Forms and Commitment to Individual Freedom or to Law and Order

	Congruent Frame	*Dual Frame*	*Default*
Individual freedom adherents (n = 273)	.89[a]	.75	.83[b]
Law and order adherents (n = 482)	.37[b]	.46	.70[a]

[a] The difference from the Dual Frame is significant ($p < .05$).
[b] The difference from the Dual Frame is insignificant ($p > .05$).
Data from the Multi-Investigator II

There is a final comparison, one that focuses on the consistency of issue choices when arguments are presented on opposing sides and when no arguments are expressly presented (the "default" condition). As Table 5.6 shows, there is a gain in consistency for those who favor freedom in the default condition, although it is not statistically significant no doubt because of ceiling effects. By contrast, those who favor order are markedly more likely to be consistent in the default condition. These results match almost exactly those from the "government spending" experiment, and as inspection of the means in the default condition will make plain, for the same reason. The issue of freedom of speech, like that of helping the poor, can be meaningful even in the absence of a "frame." To put the issue before citizens, formulated in terms of freedom of assembly, is to put an argument to them.

The results of the two experiments, then, are mutually supportive. But in determining the broader conclusions that should be drawn from their specific findings, and the measure of confidence that should be attached to them, a number of factors deserve consideration.

QUALIFICATIONS

Five points of qualification deserve special emphasis.

First, the coverage of issues is limited. We have examined only a pair of specific issues. The findings could well differ for other issues, especially if they are so remote from people's ordinary focus of attention that they have not worked through their connections with their deeper values and political principles or, alternatively, if they are so immediate and emotionally charged that people can call upon their own the range of arguments both pro and con. On the other hand, the issues that we have examined—government activism on behalf of the disadvantaged and freedom of expression—are two of the principal battlegrounds of contemporary politics and between them illustrate different strands of political contention.

Second, the analysis and argument have proceeded in qualitative and exploratory terms. The findings show that citizens, if exposed to opposing sides of a political argument rather than being artificially sequestered and restricted to hearing only one, tend to make specific choices that are more in line with their underlying principles. But how large, even approximately, is this gain in consistency? Under what conditions is it maximized, under what conditions minimized? What, exactly, is the role of political awareness and sophistication? Are the gains in consistency of choice equivalent at any given level of political information or, as our own intuition suggests, larger the less attentive a person ordinarily is and the more well-stocked and well-organized his or her ideas about it are as a consequence? Are there differences in the matching of principles and issues choices, particularly among the politically aware, as a function of the specific structure of political choices, and, more specifically, is there something to recommend a distinction between issues like government spending, in which the opposing alternatives are equally legitimate, and in the politically most sophisticated stratum issues like permitting freedom of expression, in which one alternative dominates the other? To get a grip on these and a host of other questions, it will be necessary to move from an impressionistic and qualitative approach to a systematic and quantitative mode.

Third, our findings will apply just so far as there are incentives and opportunities for opposing points of view to obtain public expression. This limits their application, most obviously, to democratic polities that are genuinely competitive. Less obviously, but just as importantly, our results have only a limited applicability even within genuinely competitive political systems. Political parties and the candidates who campaign under their banner do not compete on all issues. The party holding an electorally unpopular position frequently will assimilate its position to that of its competitors, minimizing and blurring its distinctiveness, leaving voters not with a choice but an echo (Petrocik 1996). Indeed, as E. E. Schattschneider (1975) and William Riker (1986) recognized, one of the most important consequences of the logic of electoral competition is to ensure that some issues, so far from being contested, are taken off the public agenda.

Fourth, our argument rests on an implicit premise that needs to be excavated and made explicit. The standard studies of framing have erred, we have argued, by contrasting citizens' reactions only when they hear either one side of a political argument or the other. The vital contrast, we have contended, is when they hear both because in real politics that is precisely what competing candidates and parties are bent on doing—making sure that voters are exposed to their side of the issues. It is, however, important to emphasize the difference between the state of affairs in real politics, in which political contestants broadcast and otherwise disseminate messages summarizing their views, which is an integral element in political compe-

tition in properly democratic polities, and the state of affairs in our studies, in which experiments are carried out in a way to assure that respondents receive these messages. Exposure to a message is one thing; reception, another. This difference between exposure and reception applies with special force the less well-informed or attentive citizens are to politics. It follows that in the world as it really is (as opposed to the way it is represented in the experiments of our study), political debate may not have so corrective an effect on the political reasoning of ordinary citizens, particularly if they are politically disengaged or politically ill-informed. On the other side, on exactly the same reasoning, the politically least well-informed are the least likely to take in arguments at odds with their general political orientation, so far as they have formed them, and thus should be the least likely to be deflected by them.[31]

Fifth, our interest is in the conditions under which citizens can exercise political judgment. We have taken as our standard of political judgment the extent to which their specific choices conform to their avowed principles. This is, we think, a necessary condition of citizenship: if citizens are easily blown off course by the crosswinds of political debate, it is hard to understand the sense in which they can be said to be capable of exercising political judgment. On the other hand, even if being able to bring to bear one's principles is a necessary condition of being able to exercise political judgment, it is not a sufficient one. For it also is necessary that citizens be able to make their decisions in the light of distinctive features of specific alternatives they are asked to weigh. How well, if at all, ordinary citizens are capable of taking account of individuating characteristics of political choices—and in particular under what conditions, if any, they are capable of tempering their convictions in response to the (occasionally) unique features of ordinarily well-rubbed choices—is not a question that we have examined.

Conclusion

Our findings point to two broad lessons, one methodological, the other substantive.

We begin with the methodological moral. Framing theorists, as part of their very own argument, called attention to the competitive character of political argumentation. Indeed, the whole launching point for the framing argument, as we observed, is the express claim that politics characteristically involves "an environment that carries roughly evenly balanced communications on both sides of issues."[32] But as we have seen, their theoretical argument and their methodological design collide. All studies of framing carried out to this point have conformed to the so-called split-ballot design in which there are, by standard, only two experimental

conditions. It was natural, therefore, for framing experiments just to contrast reactions when respondents are presented with one side of an argument with their reactions when presented with an opposing side. But overlooking the politically crucial circumstance when they are exposed to both sides leads, as we have shown, to a hugely inflated impression of the pliability of the ordinary citizen's judgment. The moral to draw is unequivocal. Methodological designs should follow from the theoretical question being treated rather than the treatment of the theoretical question following from the methodological design.

The substantive issue goes deeper. According to the framing theory of public opinion, citizens are not capable of political judgment: the very same person will approve a course of government action or oppose it depending on how the issue happens to be framed at the moment of choice.[33] Citizens, a limited number of suitable exceptions to one side, are not able to judge the alternatives open for consideration in the light of relevant principles. They are instead puppets, voting thumbs up or down depending on how issues are framed, their strings being pulled by elites who frame issues to guarantee political outcomes. The result is to call democracy itself into question. As Entman has noted, "[I]f by shaping frames elites can determine the major manifestations of 'true' public opinion that are available to government (via polls or voting), what can true public opinion be? How can even sincere democratic representatives respond correctly to public opinion when empirical evidence of it appears to be so malleable, so vulnerable to framing effects."[34]

We want to emphasize that, using the same design as framing studies, our findings are the same as theirs. If the issue of government spending for the poor is framed in terms of increasing opportunities for the poor, a majority favors it; if it is framed in terms of increasing taxes, a majority opposes it. Identically, if the question of allowing a group with extreme views to hold a public rally is cast in terms of freedom of expression, a majority favors it; if it is cast in terms of the risk of violence, a majority opposes it. Not everyone switches sides. But in both experiments citizens look like puppets forming majorities on either side of the issues depending on how they are framed.

These results notwithstanding, this whole body of studies on framing has gone terribly wrong by overlooking politics itself. In a properly democratic polity opposing camps campaign on behalf of competing ways of understanding what is at issue. And our findings demonstrate that political debate, being exposed to opposing sides, tightens the linkages of mass belief systems and increases the constraint between basic principles and specific issue choices. The deeper lesson of our findings is thus that the clash of political arguments, so far from overwhelming or perplexing or blinding the political judgments of ordinary citizens, may be a condition of the possibility of their exercising it.

Notes

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1. See Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954.
2. See, for example, Gamson and Modigliani 1989.
3. Gamson and Modigliani (1989:3), emphasis in original.
4. The distinction that Gamson and Modigliani (1989) draw between "framing devices" and "reasoning devices," strictly defined, like so many of their fine-grained distinctions, have been lost in the more coarsely woven framing analysis that has subsequently appeared.
5. Kinder and Sanders 1990; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Zaller 1992.
6. Gamson and Modigliani 1987:143.
7. Zaller 1992:82.
8. Nelson and Kinder 1996:1057. See also Entman 1993.
9. Nelson and Kinder 1996:1057.
10. Gamson and Modigliani 1989:3.
11. Obviously, the class of framing effects of the second kind, involving alterations in the balance of opinion on an issue, must logically include that of framing effects of the first kind, involving alteration of the reasons for taking a position on an issue.
12. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) advanced the ambivalence argument; see also Zaller and Feldman 1992.
13. Zaller 1992:93.
14. Nelson and Kinder 1996:1058.
15. Zaller and Feldman 1992:585.
16. Zaller 1992:93.
17. Ibid., 55.
18. Ibid., 54.
19. Zaller 1992:95.
20. Nelson and Kinder 1996:1058. See also Hochschild 1981; Chong 1993.
21. Lane 1962.
22. Zaller 1992:59.
23. Nelson and Kinder 1996:1058.
24. Gamson and Modigliani (e.g., 1989) point to, among other things, the inherent contestability of frames and the foundational role, even for obtrusive issues, of meaning-generating experiences in people's everyday lives.
25. Since the response rate is 56 percent we have carried out a multipoint comparison between the sample characteristics and the Current Population Survey, examining the joint distributions of gender, age, education, and race. The fit for whites is extremely close (e.g., the proportion of less-than-high-school-educated

white males in the sample between the ages of 18 and 29 in our weighted sample is 7.2, as compared to 9.7 in the CPS.

26. We follow here an inventory of Rawls 1993.

27. Giving strength to this suspicion, Kinder and Sanders (1990) observe that the balance of opinion on affirmative action was not affected by the alternative ways they choose to frame the issue.

28. The Multi-Investigator political information parallels the standard National Election Studies measure, gauging awareness of elementary facts about political institutions.

29. We recognize that Converse, introducing the term *constraint,* deployed it only to index consistency across issue positions. We use the term more broadly to refer to the tightening of belief system linkages.

30. The rally experiment focuses on support for a societally approved norm, freedom of speech, and there not surprisingly is a ceiling effect constraining the difference to be observed between the counter- and dual-frame conditions among the best informed.

31. Nor is it irrelevant that in their immediate circle of acquaintances, they are likely to be predominantly surrounded by people whose outlook broadly matches their own. See Mutz 1998.

32. Zaller 1992:59.

33. It surely is true that the balance of opinion in public referenda can shift, from a majority in support to a majority in opposition, depending on how the issue is defined. Referenda on affirmative action are a case in point. If the question is defined in terms of prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, as it was for example in elections in California and in Washington, then a majority backs it. If it is defined in relatively neutral terms, then a majority backs this. It is worth underlining that the ballot is a setting precisely where citizens are not simultaneously exposed to opposing formulations.

34. Entman 1993:57.

Appendix

Question Wording for Table 5.1:

"Higher Taxes" Frame: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people, *even if it means higher taxes*?

"Getting Ahead" Frame: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people *so they can have a better chance of getting ahead in life*?

Commitment to Equality or Economic Growth: How about narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor OR increasing economic growth? If

you had to choose between these two, which would you say is more important?

Question Wording for Table 5.2:

"Higher Taxes" Frame: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people, *even if it means higher taxes*? [This is the counterframe for the egalitarians.]

"Getting Ahead" Frame: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people *so they can have a better chance of getting ahead in life*? [This is the counterframe for the economic growth proponents.]

Dual Frame: Taking into account both the fact that programs for the poor could mean higher taxes and the need for poor people to have a better chance of getting ahead in life, are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people? [Half of the time the frames were reversed.]

Commitment to Equality or Economic Growth: How about narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor OR increasing economic growth? If you had to choose between these two, which would you say is more important?

Question Wording for Table 5.3:

"Higher Taxes" Frame: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people, *even if it means higher taxes?* [This is the congruent frame for the economic growth proponents.]

"Getting Ahead" Frame: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people *so they can have a better chance of getting ahead in life*? [This is the congruent frame for the egalitarians.]

Dual Frame: Taking into account both the fact that programs for the poor could mean higher taxes and the need for poor people to have a better chance of getting ahead in life, are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people? [Half of the time, the frames were reversed.]

Default: Are you in favor of or opposed to a big increase in government spending to increase opportunities for poor people?

Commitment to Equality or Economic Growth: How about narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor OR increasing economic growth? If you had to choose between these two, which would you say is more important?

Question Wording for Table 5.4:

This next question is about a group that has very extreme political views. Suppose they wanted to hold a public rally to express their ideas.

"Violent Risk" Frame: Given the risk of violence, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally?

"Free Speech" Frame: Given the importance of free speech, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally?

Commitment to Law and Order: How about guaranteeing law and order in society OR guaranteeing individual freedom? If you had to choose between these two, which would you say is more important?

Question Wording for Table 5.5:

This next question is about a group that has very extreme political views. Suppose they wanted to hold a public rally to express their ideas.

"Violent Risk" Frame: Given the risk of violence, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally? [This is the counterframe for the individual freedom adherents.]

"Free Speech" Frame: Given the importance of free speech, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally? [This is the counterframe for the law and order adherents.]

Dual Frame: Taking into account both the importance of free speech and the risk of violence, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally? [Half of the time the frames were reversed.]

Commitment to Law and Order or Individual Freedom: How about guaranteeing law and order in society OR guaranteeing individual free-

dom? If you had to choose between these two, which would you say is more important?

Question Wording for Table 5.6:

This next question is about a group that has very extreme political views. Suppose they wanted to hold a public rally to express their ideas.

"Violent Risk" Frame: Given the risk of violence, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally? [This is the congruent frame for the law and order adherents.]

"Free Speech" Frame: Given the importance of free speech, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally? [This is the congruent frame for the individual freedom adherents.]

Dual Frame: Taking into account both the importance of free speech and the risk of violence, would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally? [Half of the time the frames were reversed.]

Default: Would you be in favor of or opposed to allowing this group to hold the rally?

Commitment to Law and Order or Individual Freedom: How about guaranteeing law and order in society OR guaranteeing individual freedom? If you had to choose between these two, which would you say is more important?

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