

Message or Messenger?
The Limits of Moral Leadership

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Media coverage of policies sometimes includes quotes from opinion leaders sharing their views on what the policy should be. Politicians and clergy are often prominent among these opinion leaders, on a range of social and economic issues. What happens when political and religious leaders convey conflicting messages? Whose message is likely to sway citizens?

We seek to understand the role of leaders, both moral and political, in opinion formation. Citizens often look to elites for leadership on difficult and pressing social concerns. Giving advice is an important aspect of leadership, as leaders often appear to possess a great capacity to sway the opinions of their followers. When political ideologies and moral values collide in the political area over questions of government policy, citizens may receive guidance from both religious and political leaders. Whose leadership will they follow on such matters like euthanasia and stem cell research? Will they follow the same guides on issues like elderly care or support for the poor? For example, when the question of same sex marriage was raised in Canada in 2003, the Liberal Party supported changing the traditional definition, but many church leaders took public stances in favor of the traditional definition of marriage. This case inspired us to wonder how these sources influenced how citizens formed their own opinions. To whom did they turn for opinion guidance? Whose leadership was more effective or persuasive?

The goal of this investigation is to gauge the power of messages from moral leadership sources relative to the power of messages from political leadership sources. Which source of leadership is more influential in the formation and articulation of citizen preferences? Despite the influence of these leaders in opinion formation, most studies in political science have focused on the message, not the messenger. Furthermore, we are also interested in whether “matching”, in terms of the frame and source of a message, matters for having an influence on voters. In our experiment, we separate the message from the messenger and combine the two to see what happens when the message and the messenger interact.

Based on Shah, Domke and Wackman’s (2001) research, we begin with the expectation that frames with an ethical or moral focus will be more influential than material or political frames. We hypothesize that the most successful messages will match a leader’s area of authority, an issue in that area, and a message that reflects his or her expertise; in order for people to accept frames and use them in their decision-making, they must believe the leader possesses the relevant expertise (Lupia 2002) and must trust the leader’s judgment (Bianco 1994). If religious leaders are seen as experts on moral issues, we expect that those are issues on which religious leaders may affect opinions more than political leaders while on other issues the opposite may be true. We also take into account the issue-context of the frame, expecting that certain sources and frames will be more powerful when employed in the corresponding, or matching, issue-context. Our project breaks new ground by attempting to measure the power of different sources of opinion leadership across different issues. We distinguish between persuasion and framing by examining variation on both opinion and belief importance measures.

We expect that one's reception of messages will be partially mitigated by whether or not the source is perceived as appropriate for the issue in question. We expect that there may be differences between countries that affect the appropriateness of the source. By implementing our study with students in both Canada and the United States we observe the impact of national context on our subjects. While these societies share many similarities, Canada is thought to be a more deferential (Lipset 1990) but yet is more secular and religion plays a much less prominent role in political life.

In this paper, we present results from a recent experiment that compared the effects of two alternative frames paired with two different sources of leadership, one religious and one political. In this way, we can examine how influential each frame, each source and each combination of frames and sources are in affecting citizens. In this paper, we present evidence gathered from students at two Canadian universities and one American university who were exposed to statements on two issues, cutting government programs to address government debt and embryonic stem-cell research.

Our findings provide evidence that source effects do in fact matter for opinion formation. For our first issue, source, frame and the interaction of the two were significant in our U.S. sample, and the source was also significant in the Canadian sample. Both the source and the interaction between the source and the frame influenced several measures of belief importance in the Canadian sample, but our framing stimuli alone did not significantly affect opinion or belief importance on welfare. Some American respondents' beliefs were significantly influenced by the experimental conditions; most often by the source, but twice by the frame and once by the interaction of the source and the frame. For our second issue, stem-cell research, our results indicate that framing influenced opinions for Canadian Catholics who participated in our study, but not for non-Catholic Canadians. We also found source and some source-frame interaction effects on a few belief importance measures. For US respondents, there were no significant effects on opinions and very few on belief importance measures. We believe that our findings point to the need for further research into this area in order to disentangle the influences of message and messengers in public opinion.

Literature Review/Context

The fear that citizens would prove to be too easily manipulated by elites has followed democratic theorists since ancient Athens. In modern times, much scholarship is devoted to the question of whether citizens have enough information to cast informed votes (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Fournier 2002) or answer public opinion surveys in a non-random fashion. After decades of survey research, a picture has emerged of a heterogeneous public whose often inconsistent responses to opinion questions are affected by the varying accessibility of relevant information (e.g. Tourangeau et al 2000).

The lack of consistency is especially troubling for notions of a "rational" choice. The dominant view of rationality in economics and political science is based upon notions of consistency, which allows for a range of tastes. Choices are assumed to be invariant and unaffected by question order, method of evaluation, or the description of the different alternatives. These assumptions provide the intellectual foundation for investigations into

individual and group behavior in both economics and political science. In political science, these inquiries include seminal works on understanding the basis of interest group participation (Olson 1965), legislative organization (Krehbiel 1991), and volumes on the impact and importance of institutions (e.g. Shepsle 1979, Knight 1992).

However, scholars, primarily in psychology, have documented ways in which these assumptions do not appropriately reflect how people make decisions (e.g. Simon 1955, Kahneman and Tversky 1984, Quattrone and Tversky 1988, Thaler 1999). Because people often lack the information they need to make carefully reasoned, informed political decisions (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Fournier 2002), many people rely on readily available cues to make those decisions (Fiske and Taylor 1991, Popkin 1991). Often, such cues come from the frame, or mental structure, used to simplify our understanding of a complex issue, through which the issue is presented. Tversky and Kahneman (1981) define a “decision frame” as “the decision-maker’s conception of the acts, outcomes and contingencies associated with a particular choice.”

There exists a large body of research that focuses on how the media, political leaders, and even salespeople, can frame decisions, especially in the United States (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Nelson and Oxley 1999, Jacoby 2000, Cialdini 2001). Frames can influence what opinion is likely to be chosen by limiting the options recognized as possible solutions to a problem (Entman 1993) and by emphasizing a particular piece of information or view (Nelson and Willey 2001). Rather than directly changing a person’s views, framing manipulates the importance of certain beliefs or concerns, making these beliefs or concerns more salient to the decision. Whether or not a decision-maker adopts a frame for use is determined partly by the formulation of the problem and partly by the personal characteristics and biases of the decision-maker (Entman 1989, Graber 1988). While this literature is rich in the context of the United States, few studies of framing effects have been completed in Canada (see Sniderman et al. 1996).

Some frames have been found to be more influential than others. Shah, Domke and Wackman (2001) found that ethical value-frames activate ethical interpretations of an issue grounded in beliefs about what is right and wrong. In contrast, material value-frames activate tangible material concerns such as efficiency, practicality and self-interest. Their experiments demonstrated that subjects exposed to ethical value-frames reasoned about health care policies in ethical terms, but those who heard the same issue explained in material terms did not. Druckman (2001) found that the use of ethical frames resulted in a higher probability of agreement, explaining the inconsistencies that violated the assumptions of rational choice.

Druckman’s work is the only study that we know of that varies both the framing of the message and the source of the message on an issue. This is surprising when one considers that most people will receive their political information through television and newspaper stories that usually quote so-called “experts” on the topic. The persuasive powers of these “experts” are at the root of this paper since their opinions may be the only opinions to which the citizen is exposed. Still, scholars have only recently explored how much the messenger matters to the success of the message (see Lupia 2002). Druckman found that

when a respected leader like Colin Powell employed a frame, it was even more powerful than when the source of the frame was Jerry Springer, a talk-show host who does not command much respect. The difference was most pronounced for material frames. However, when both Jerry Springer and Colin Powell employed ethical frames, a smaller difference was observed. This sparked a question of what we might find if, in contrast to Springer and Powell, the source was viewed as an authority on ethical matters. Religious leaders, we assume, are such authorities who would likely be asked to comment by the media on these topics.

In addition to these queries, we are interested in how country context may influence the reception of elite messages. The U.S. and Canada offer an interesting comparison for several reasons. Canada has one of the highest correlations between denomination and vote (Dalton 2002). However, while Americans are accustomed to politicians employing religious-based appeals, especially from the right, these appeals are virtually absent in Canada (Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1997). As a result, a linkage between traditional morality and conservative politics is less clear in Canada. In the U.S., citizens are more likely to be Protestant churchgoers, but they tend to change churches before changing their views, causing some to predict that traditional religious authorities are weakening even as scriptural literalism increases (see Pfaff 2005). In contrast, Canadians are less likely to attend religious services, more likely to be Catholic and thought to be more deferential to authority (Lipset 1990). While our subjects are not drawn from a representative sample of either country's society, we can still examine whether individual Canadians are, *ceteris paribus*, more deferential, but less swayed by appeals from religious leaders.

Hypotheses

When multiple beliefs held by a decision-maker conflict (Alvarez and Brehm 2002, Fournier 2003), some values must take priority over other values (see Schwartz 1994). In this case, guidance from leaders whom citizens are predisposed to follow are especially influential (Zaller 1992), but only if the citizens believe the leader possesses the relevant expertise (Lupia 2002). A logical consequence of this is that there are some issues on which religious leaders may affect opinions more than political leaders, while on other issues the opposite may be true.

The specific hypotheses that we investigate in this study are as follows:

H1a: Religious leaders' influence on opinions will be most pronounced on issues where religious leaders are seen as being credible authorities.

H1b: Religious leaders' influence on opinions will be most pronounced when they employ ethical frames.

H2a: Political leaders' influence on opinions will be strongest on issues where political leaders are seen as being authorities.

H2b: Political leaders' influence on opinions will be strongest when they employ material frames.

Although we cannot generalize our findings to national populations or be confident that national population traits will exhibit themselves in our sample, we will also observe whether the above hypotheses are sensitive to the national context after controlling for individual traits.

H3: Each of the above hypotheses (H1a-H2b) will vary systematically by country:

H3a: Canadian deference: There should be a higher likelihood of agreement among Canadians with the message even when controlling for individual traits like religiosity and partisanship.

H3b: Even when controlling for religiosity, Americans should be more likely to agree with religious leaders, reflecting a greater level of familiarity with religious participation in the political discourse in the United States.

We hypothesize that the most successful messages will match an issue in the leader's area of authority and an argument that reflects his or her expertise. For people to accept frames and use them in their decision-making, they must believe the leader possesses the relevant expertise (Lupia 2002) and must trust the leader's judgment (Bianco 1994). If religious leaders are seen as experts on moral issues, we expect that those are issues on which religious leaders may affect opinions more than political leaders, while on other issues the opposite may be true.

Methodology

As noted above, extant research (Druckman 2001, Lupia 2002) has found evidence that suggests that both the message and the messenger are important considerations in the influence of frames for opinion formation. In order to determine whether successful persuasion depends on the framing of the message alone or is enhanced by attribution to a particular leader, we developed an experimental design that enabled us to separate the effect of the message from the source of that message.

This paper reports the results of experiment conducted in 2005 and 2006. The experiment was built into a 7 page survey questionnaire. The survey asked subjects basic demographic information, some questions about political information, and also included questions about two specific issues. Prior to each issue question, subjects were exposed to a message (ethical or material) attributed to a particular individual (political or moral). The order of the issue questions varied, so there were 32 different versions of our questionnaire. After each issue question, the subjects were exposed to a battery of questions on beliefs about what was important to their deliberation and what might ensue as a result of the advocated policy change. We asked respondents about eight different beliefs or concerns. We asked the respondent to rate four of them using a four-point scale

of belief importance. The other four were events that were rated as likely or unlikely to occur on a four point scale.

We analyzed the results using a two-way ANOVA.¹ This method allows us to specify two main effects, source and framing, and the interaction of the two. Data collected from the socio-demographic questions were added to the between-subjects experimental effects analyses.

Participants

Subjects were told that they were participating in a study about political leadership. If they agreed to participate, they were asked to complete a survey that asked for their opinions on political issues. Subjects in our study were students at two Canadian universities, the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario and one American university. Each university is a public university that draws most of its students from the immediate region. Subjects at the University of Toronto were recruited in several campus study and social areas (67.87% female, average age of 21) over the course of four days, and were compensated with a candy bar. At the University of Western Ontario, volunteer subjects were drawn from two sources: students recruited through the use of advertisements in common areas and classroom announcements, and students in undergraduate classes (40.21% female, average age of 21). UWO students were compensated \$5 Cdn for participation. Subjects at the University of Delaware were recruited through one political science course and in the campus dining centre (56.41% female, average age of 21), and were compensated with chips or cookies. The studies were conducted at the University of Toronto in December 2005, at the University of Western Ontario in March 2006, and at the University of Delaware in April 2006. The surveys were administered via paper-and-pencil, in common areas and classrooms borrowed for administration of the study. At the end of the study, subjects were debriefed with a short explanation about the purpose of the study, and compensated before leaving.

As might be expected if the sample were drawn from the general population, the American students were more likely to attend religious services at least once or twice a month. The American respondents were more likely to be Catholic, while nearly half of the Canadian respondents were not even Christian. The Canadian students were more likely to report being interested in politics, while the American students were more likely to report feeling close to a particular political party. The proportion of Democrats in the US sample was almost the same as the proportion of Liberals and NDP supporters in the Canadian sample.

Design

¹ While the code in STATA is the same, technically speaking, many of our analyses were ANCOVAS because we included ordinal or interval-level independent variables in our model.

To test our several hypotheses in an experiment, we created four different conditions, pairing each frame with each source for one of two issues (see Table 1). With two issues, we created eight different treatment groups to include all stimuli combinations or experiment conditions. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the eight different treatment groups. Because the survey questioned subjects about two different issue topics, each subject was placed into **two** different treatment groups, one for each issue.

Table 1: Experimental Design for One Issue

| <u>Source</u> | <u>Frame</u> | |
|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| | Ethical | Material |
| Political | Treatment 1 | Treatment 2 |
| Religious | Treatment 3 | Treatment 4 |

With respect to the treatments, for each issue a frame or news story that shared the opinion of a religious leader or a political leader was presented. As noted above, the source and message of the frame was altered for the different treatment groups. By changing the source of the frame, we sought to measure each leader’s relative power of persuasion by comparing the likelihood of agreement with the leader’s position across the different conditions. Changing the message of the frame allowed us to evaluate whether the impact of the leader is dependent on matching the moral leader to a moral argument, a political leader to a political argument, or whether the leaders are just as persuasive employing frames that do not match their expertise.

In Canada, we chose two politicians (former Finance Minister Ralph Goodale and Member of Parliament Rob Merrifield), and two moral leaders (Archbishop Terence Finlay of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition and Deacon William Kokesch of the Catholic Organization for Life and Family) to use as messengers. For the messages, we chose two that relied on moral logic, and two that used material logic (see Appendix). In the United States, we chose to use Treasury Secretary John W. Snow and Congressman Cliff Stearns (a Republican) as political sources, and Rev. Dr. Albert M. Pennybacker (CEO of the Clergy Leadership Network) and Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza (president of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops) are religious sources. The messages used in the American study were the same as those used in Canada.

The survey was piloted with students at the University of Toronto to ensure that the stimuli (the frame or story) was believable, the issue was genuine and generally considered to be moral or political, the statements of the leader were realistic, both frames provide compelling reasons to support the leader’s view of the policy, and the entire survey could be completed in a reasonable amount of time.

Key Variables

After exposure to the specific frame, subjects were asked a series of opinion questions relating to two issues. First, we asked for the subject's opinion on the issue. We chose issues that were very different from each other: cutting government spending to decrease the debt and stem cell research. The intent was to have one issue that was clearly situated in the political realm, and another that was clearly an issue that many decided on the basis of morality. After asking their opinion on the issue, the survey asked subjects to rate the importance of a number of ideas or concerns to the subject's opinion. Finally, we asked the subject's opinion of the likelihood of a variety of consequences that might occur as a result of the change in policy.

For example, a subject was asked his/her opinion about stem cell research, then asked how important each of the following ideas were to the formation of that opinion: whether or not embryos are human life that cannot be destroyed; whether or not people will enjoy many scientific benefits as a result of this research; the cost of the research and the whether the government could afford such an investment; and how appropriate it is to use tax-payer money for something that many citizens might find offensive because it violates their religious principles. Last, the survey probed how likely the subject thought each of the following consequences was: stem cell research will lead to the discovery of cures for many diseases; stem cell research will lead to a greater number of abortions; stem cell research will have a negative effect on the government's budget; and adult stem cell research that does not require embryos will lead to similar discoveries.

Results

Government Spending

In Canada, the two sources we employed to discuss social programs and the government debt were former Finance Minister Ralph Goodale (a Liberal) and Archbishop Terence Finlay of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition. In the United States, the sources were Rev. Dr. Albert M. Pennybacker, CEO of the Clergy Leadership Network and Treasury Secretary John W. Snow. The material quote emphasized "provincial governments must have the necessary fiscal resources" (see Appendix for full quote), and advocated efforts to reduce debt. The ethical quote emphasized the plight of disadvantaged people and advocated greater measures to help the poor.

To refresh, our expectations for this issue are that matching the source with the issue context will yield stronger results. Specifically,

H1a: Goodale's and Snow's [political] messages should be more influential than Finlay's and Pennybacker's [religious].

H1b: Goodale's and Snow's messages should be most influential when paired with the material frame (in favor of actions to lower the debt).

H3a: Canadians should be more likely to respond to Goodale’s message than Americans to Snow’s message because of Canada’s more deferential culture.

H3b: Canadians will be less likely to respond to Finlay’s message because they are less accustomed to religious influence in the political discourse.

Figure 1

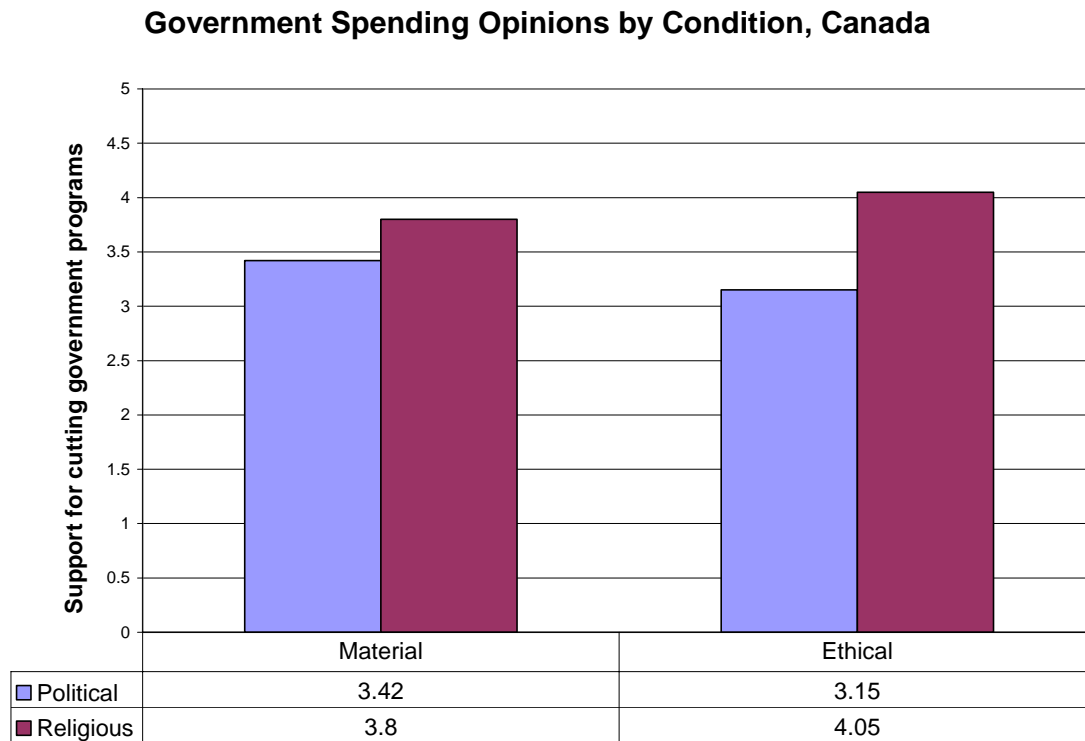
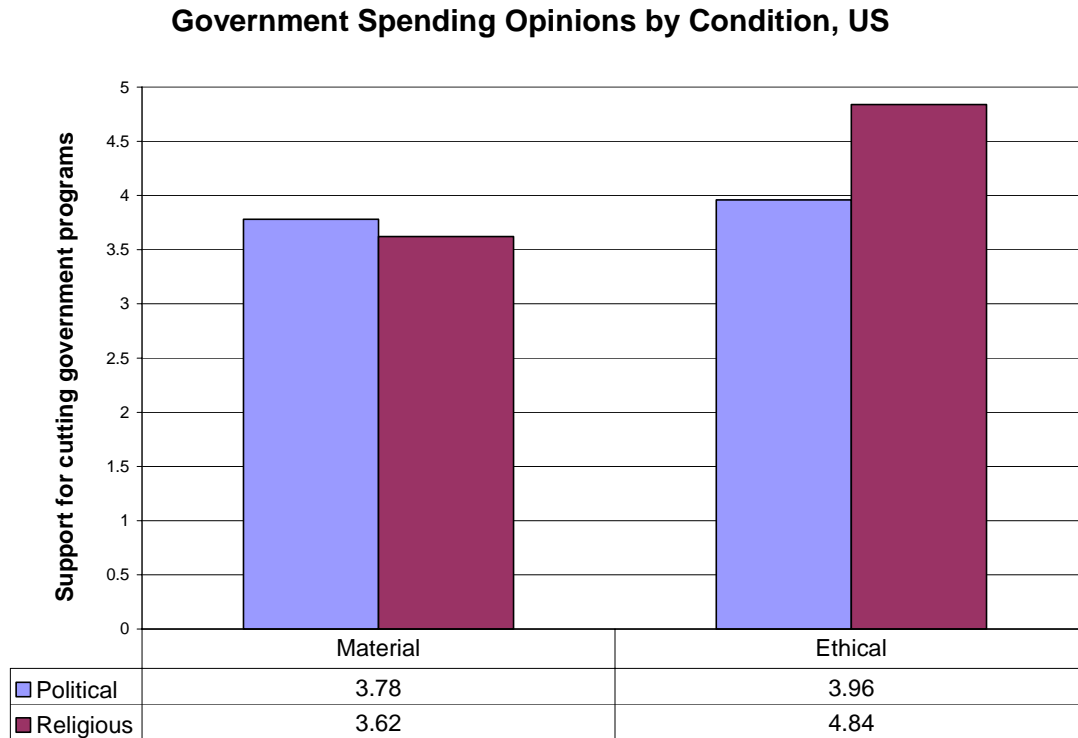


Figure 1 shows the different average responses of Canadians to the question about cutting government spending. Contrary to expectations, respondents who saw a quote attributed to the religious source (Finlay) were more likely to support cutting government programs, especially if they read the ethical frame. This is especially surprising because the ethical frame argues against cutting government programs. Compared to variation in the source, responses varied little across the different frames even though the quotes argued for different stances. A two-way ANOVA analysis found that the religious source was statistically significant, but not the interaction of the religious source and ethical frame when controlling for political interest, being a woman, identifying with Canada’s Conservative Party, being a Christian and one’s level of religious attendance.

Figure 2 shows the same data for American students. These data also behave contrary to expectations. As can be seen from the chart, those who received the ethical frame were more likely to support cutting programs, *especially* if they received the frame from a religious source. Further analyses reveal that respondents who received the ethical frame from a religious source responded significantly differently from all other groups. Two-

way ANOVA analyses also reveal that the source, frame, and interaction of the source and frame are all statistically significant when various controls are included.

Figure 2



A possible explanation for the strange direction of the influence of the ethical frame and religious source could be that the message was unexpected, and thus subjects gave it more weight. One might expect religious leaders to focus on increases in spending; thus, when they support a decrease, subjects may reason that there is an important reason for doing so and be further influenced by the message.²

Despite Shah, Domke and Wackman’s (2001) finding that different frames should activate different concerns, our analysis did not find that the variation in frames affected significant changes in respondents’ beliefs about what was important when thinking about government programs for the poor and the budget deficit. In only two cases in the US were there significant effects (for the questions about whether people are suffering, and whether spending cuts would lead more people to find jobs). However, when employing a two-way ANOVA and controlling for the same independent variables listed above, we found that there were significant source effects in Canada (see Table 2). Respondents who saw quotes attributed to Goodale rated three of the four decision factors as more important, on average, than those who saw quotes attributed to religious leaders

² We thank an earlier reviewer for pointing out this possibility.

regardless of the quote. The interaction term between frame and source (religious-ethical) was also significant for thinking about the suffering of people and whether people are trapped by economic circumstances. The importance of economic growth to the thinking of the respondents was not affected by either the frame or the source, which is not that surprising considering neither set of quotes addressed economic growth. In the US, only the ethical frame was significant for thinking about the suffering of people.

When we look at the source effects on responses to possible consequences, the results are strongest in the US. The source is important for responses to three of four questions, and on the fourth the interaction is significant. Thinking about conditions for the poor worsening, taxes decreasing, and people becoming more self-reliant were all made more important by the source of the treatment. Thinking that the economy would improve was affected by the interaction of the religious source and ethical frame. In Canada, the perceived likelihood of the economy improving was also affected by changing the source of the quote and by the interaction of ethical frame and religious source. People exposed to the political source and the material frame were more optimistic about the economy. The perceived likelihood of people becoming more self-reliant was influenced by the religious source, but not the interaction. Surprisingly, the assessed likelihood that people's economic conditions would improve was not affected by the different treatments even though the ethical frame directly references the need to address poverty. There was also no effect on the subjects' expectations that taxes would decrease.

We found striking similarities across the two countries in belief importance and expectations. Despite differences in opinion, and how persuasive the frame or the source was, the underlying average beliefs and expectations were almost identical. After merging the data, we ran a regression that included interaction terms for Canadians who received the ethical frame, the religious source, and the interaction. While the variables themselves were insignificant, a likelihood-ratio test showed that the combination of the interaction and the dummy variable was significant. When the interaction was excluded from the model, the dummy variable for "Canadian" was significant. This indicates that, *ceteris paribus*, the Canadian subjects were less likely to prefer cuts to government spending than the American subjects. Thus, while there do appear to be differences between Canadians and Americans in terms of policy preferences, there does not appear to be any difference in the influence of elite messages, contrary to our expectations.

Stem Cell Research

Both quotes on adult stem cell research opposed government funding of the research. The material quote emphasized the unproven, untested nature of the research relative to other disease research. The ethical quote stressed the nature of human life and the need for scientific progress while "respecting human dignity" (see Appendix). In Canada, the quotes were attributed to either a Canadian MP, Rob Merrifield (a Conservative) or Deacon William Kokesch of the Catholic Organization for Life and Family.

In the United States, we adapted the sources of the messages to reflect the country, but we did not alter the messages themselves (for comparability). We attributed the quotes to

either Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, president of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, or Congressman Cliff Stearns (a Republican).

Our expectations for this issue are:

H2a: Kokesch and Fiorenza's [religious] messages should be more influential than Merrifield and Stearns's [political].

H2b: Kokesch and Fiorenza's messages should be most influential when paired with the ethical frame.

H3a: Canadians should be more likely to respond to Merrifield's message than Americans to Stearns's message because of Canada's more deferential culture.

H3b: Canadians will be less influenced by Kokesch's message because they are less accustomed to religious influence in the political discourse.

There were no significant differences across the experimental conditions in the responses to how the subject thought about stem-cell research. Neither the frames, nor the sources, nor the interactions were significant in influencing opinion formation. A majority of respondents, in both countries, favored (at least weakly) government support of stem-cell research.

Because the religious source quote was Catholic, and it could be argued that the issue was religiously sensitive, we separated the Catholic respondents from the non-Catholic respondents and repeated our analysis to see if the results improved. Canada has more Catholics than Protestants, and we had 123 respondents (about 30% of our study) who identified as Catholic. In the US sample, 37.7% were Catholic. In both of our samples, Catholics were a little more likely to express opposition to government funded stem-cell research ($P > 0.05$, one tailed test).

A two-way ANOVA found that the interaction term was significant for Catholic stem-cell opinions in Canada, but not in the United States. To our surprise, the interaction of the ethical frame and attributing the quote to Deacon Kokesch significantly increased Catholics' support for government funding of stem cell research. This increase remained significant even when controlling for political interest, being a woman, identifying with the Conservative Party and religious attendance. Rerunning the model as both an ordered logit and a regression buttressed the finding of the two-way ANOVA. Exposure to the ethical frame attributed to Deacon Kokesch, all else being equal, increased Catholic support for embryonic stem cell research by over one point on the seven-point scale. It is possible that this reflects the general secularism of Canadian politics; Deacon Kokesch's comments may have been judged inappropriate given the secular nature of government funding.

In Canada, for the sample as a whole, the only difference we found between the treatment groups for how important different beliefs were was for thinking about the cost stem cell research (see Table 3). Varying the source influenced how much weight respondents gave

to beliefs about cost of the research when we controlled for being a woman, being Christian, identifying with the Conservative Party and religious attendance. Relative to those who read the material frame attributed to the political leader, respondents who read the same quote attributed to the religious leader diminished the importance of the cost of research. The interaction term was also significant. When we separated out the Catholic respondents, we found that the source and interaction effects were only significant for Catholics. However, when we added the interaction terms for each of experimental conditions (including the interaction) and Catholics, we found that the simple main effect of the religious source and the interaction of source and frame were still significant, as well as the interaction between source and Catholic.

The experimental conditions did not affect the importance of thinking that embryos were or were not human life, the benefits that people would get from the research or the appropriateness of using tax-payer money for something citizens might find offensive (see Table 3). However, when we separated out the Catholics, we found that there was a significant effect of the ethical frame (but not the interaction) on the weight of thinking that embryos were or were not human life for non-Catholics.

In the United States, the findings are similar. The ethical frame was significant for the importance of the idea that people would benefit from the research, and the interaction of the religious source and ethical frame were significant for the importance of the cost of the research, controlling for political interest, being female, Republican ID, being a Christian and religious attendance. When we separated the Catholics from non-Catholics, only the ethical frame had a statistically significant influence on believing that many benefits will come from embryonic stem cell research.

Turning to the likely consequences of government-supported stem cell research, the results were also weak. In Canada, expectations that the research would lead to cures for many diseases were influenced by the interaction term. People were more optimistic about possible cures when expertise and frame matched. The ethical frame was also significant for believing that adult stem cell research could lead to similar discoveries. Catholic and non-Catholic thinking on the promise of stem cell research were influenced a little differently, as Catholics were significantly influenced by Deacon Kokesch but not the interaction. The interaction term for the religious source and being Catholic was significant when added to the model of the entire sample.

The ethical frame caused respondents to think that it was more likely that adult stem cell research that does not require embryos will lead to similar discoveries. This is surprising since the frame does not mention this issue. When we separated the Catholics from the non-Catholics, we found this framing effect was only significant for Catholics. However, when we included an interaction between Catholic and the ethical frame, the main effect of the frame was significant, while the interaction between Catholic and ethical frame was insignificant.

In the United States, only the religious source was significant for believing that cures for many diseases would result from embryonic stem-cell research for the whole sample.

Considering just Catholics, this finding held and the ethical frame became significant for believing that more abortions would occur as a result of the research.

In terms of cross-national differences, we do not find any support for our hypotheses that Canadians should be more deferential and less influenced by religious leaders. That Deacon Kokesch's message influenced Catholic Canadians in an opposite direction suggests that they are less deferential, but that religious leaders may still capture their attention, even if they are not persuaded by them. Regressions including Canadian interaction terms revealed no significant findings, and a likelihood ratio test revealed that the model was not enhanced by the inclusion of such terms.

Summary of key findings

- Changing the source had a persuasive effect on policy opinions. Attributing a quote to a religious leader rather than a political leader affected support for cutting government spending to address the debt and, among Catholics when interacted with the ethical frame, on stem-cell research.
- The source of the frames also influenced how important certain beliefs were to respondents when they thought about government spending and embryonic stem cell research.
- The interaction of a religious source and an ethical frame or political source and material frame also played a role in influencing belief importance. When religious leaders employed ethical frames, they were particularly influential on a range of indicators (but not on all measures across both issues, and not always in the expected direction).
- Canadian and American responses to the question about cuts in government spending differed, but not in ways that we expected or can readily explain. Differences in deference and the influence of religion in the two societies do not explain many differences in the responses of our student sample to elite messages.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented evidence that the messenger often matters to the acceptance of the message for both persuasion and framing. This is important to the study of leadership because we clearly show that in many cases, it is the source that matters, not what is actually being said. This is particularly pronounced in our study of government spending where the messages actually conflicted. Despite great differences in the content of the message, what mattered most was who the message was attributed to.

Framing effects matter, for the most part, as part of an interaction with source effects. Religious leaders were most persuasive when they employed ethical frames, but for the persuasion effects we found were in the wrong direction. Being told that a religious leader argued in favor of one policy actually led to less agreement with that stance on government spending and among Catholics in Canada on stem-cell research.

Some of our results deserve further investigation. First, the weakness of our findings on stem cell research could have been influenced by the choice of stem cell research as the subject of the stimuli or the stimuli may not have been as effective as we had intended. Further research is needed to tease out conditions under which source or frames matter to changing opinion and belief importance. Second, while we did not find any systematic differences between the Canadian and American samples, our analyses represent only a rough cut at understanding how context matters to the reception of messages. Future work should better specify the aspects of one's contextual situation that are expected to influence the persuasiveness of elite messages, to see if our findings hold. Finally, our findings for the influence of messages on opinions about government spending suggest that subjects were persuaded in a direction *opposite* to the message. More work needs to be done to understand what kinds of messages are the most influential, taking into account that unexpected messages, such as anti-government spending from a religious source, may have the greatest effect *because* they are unexpected.

Table 2: Summary of Government Spending Results: Two-way ANOVAs

When thinking about cutting social programs to reduce the debt, how important is the following?

| | Country | Average Response (1-4) | Experimental Effects | Other Independent Effects |
|---|---------|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Whether or not people in this country are trapped in economic conditions they are powerless to improve. | Canada | 3.17 | Source, interaction | Female, conservative ID |
| | US | 3.18 | --- | --- |
| Whether or not people in this country are suffering. | Canada | 3.24 | Source, interaction | Female, conservative ID |
| | US | 3.30 | Frame | --- |
| Whether or not economic growth requires low taxes and no spending deficits. | Canada | 3.01 | --- | Female, conservative ID |
| | US | 3.10 | --- | --- |
| Whether or not government funds can be better spent in other areas. | Canada | 3.20 | Source | Political interest |
| | US | 3.26 | --- | Religious attendance |

If the government cuts funding for social programs to reduce the debt, how likely is each to occur?

| | Country | Average Response (1-4) | Experimental Effects | Other Independent Effects |
|---|---------|------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Conditions for the poor would worsen. | Canada | 3.32 | --- | Female, conservative ID, political interest |
| | US | 3.25 | Source | Republican ID, political interest |
| The economy would improve. | Canada | 2.47 | Source, interaction | Conservative ID, religiosity |
| | US | 2.42 | Interaction | Republican ID, political interest |
| Taxes would decrease. | Canada | 2.35 | --- | --- |
| | US | 2.30 | Source | Republican ID |
| If funding for social programs is cut, more people will become self-reliant and find jobs | Canada | 2.26 | Source | Conservative ID |
| | US | 2.43 | Source, frame | Republican ID, political interest, religious attendance |

Table 3: Summary of Stem Cell Results: Two-way ANOVAs

How important are the following ideas or principles to you as you think about whether or not the government should fund stem cell research.

| | Country | Average Response (1-4) | Experimental Effects | Other Independent Effects |
|---|---------|------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Whether or not embryos are human life that cannot be destroyed. | Canada | 2.89 | --- | Female, Conservative ID, religious attendance |
| | US | 3.04 | --- | Female, religious attendance, Christian |
| Whether or not people will enjoy many scientific benefits as a result of this research. | Canada | 3.50 | --- | Conservative ID, political interest, religious attendance |
| | US | 3.52 | Frame | Female, political interest, religious attendance |
| The cost of the research and the whether the government can afford such an investment. | Canada | 3.00 | Source, interaction | Female, political interest, Conservative ID |
| | US | 3.03 | Interaction | --- |
| How appropriate it is to use tax-payer money for something that many citizens might find offensive... | Canada | 3.02 | --- | Female, religious attendance |
| | US | 3.13 | --- | Religious attendance |

If the government supported embryonic stem-cell research, how likely is it for the following to occur.

| | Country | Average Response (1-4) | Experimental Effects | Other Independent Effects |
|--|---------|------------------------|----------------------|---|
| ... cures for many diseases. | Canada | 3.32 | Interaction | Conservative ID |
| | US | 3.32 | Source | Female, Republican ID, political interest, religious attendance |
| Stem cell research will lead to a greater number of abortions. | Canada | 2.22 | --- | Religious attendance, Christian |
| | US | 2.22 | --- | Christian, political interest |
| ... a negative effect on the gov't's budget. | Canada | 2.4 | --- | Conservative ID |
| | US | 2.41 | --- | Republican ID, political interest |
| Adult stem cell research ... will lead to similar discoveries. | Canada | 2.66 | Frame | --- |
| | US | 2.67 | --- | --- |

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Appendix

Issue Questions (Both countries)

Government Spending Reform:

Some believe that government programs should be cut in order to address the problem of growing government debt. Others argue that doing so would seriously harm existing social programs like social assistance and support for the poor.

What is your opinion on this issue? *Please circle the number that best indicates whether you support or oppose cutting government programs in order to reduce the debt.*

| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | DK |
|---|---------|------------------|--|-----------------|--------|--|----------------------|
| Strongly support cutting social programs to reduce the debt | Support | Somewhat Support | Neither support nor oppose cutting social programs to address the debt | Somewhat Oppose | Oppose | Strongly oppose cutting social programs to reduce the debt | Not Sure/ Don't Know |

Stem-Cell Research:

Stem cells are cells that our bodies use to produce other kinds of cells. These cells can be found in organs throughout the body in every stage of human development, from embryo to adult. Several countries are debating whether to use tax-payer money to fund stem-cell research even if those stem-cells come from unwanted or cloned human embryos. Some propose to restrict government funds to fund only research using adult stem-cells.

What is your opinion on this issue? *Please circle the number that best indicates whether you support or oppose government funding for embryonic stem-cell research.*

| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | DK |
|--|---------|------------------|--|-----------------|--------|---|----------------------|
| Strongly support government funding for stem-cell research | Support | Somewhat Support | Neither support nor oppose government funding for stem cell research | Somewhat Oppose | Oppose | Strongly oppose government funding for stem cell research | Not Sure/ Don't Know |

Message Frames (both countries)

Government Spending on Social Programs

Moral:

“The most disadvantaged people are counting on the government to keep its promises. Otherwise, people living lives of hardship and frustration will continue to live harsh, stunted lives. We need increased government revenues to pay for affordable housing, increased social assistance rates and other measures to benefit the poor. Their needs must take priority.”

Material:

“We realize that, in order to provide conditions for economic and social security, our government must have the necessary fiscal resources. Today, this calls for actions that deal with the nation’s debt and deficit.”

Stem Cell Research

Moral:

“This nation was founded on the principles of respect of human life. And if we change that ethic to the place where we are prepared to destroy life solely for the purpose of betterment of others, then we have never gone there as a nation before. We need to move forward in a way that will facilitate scientific progress while still respecting human dignity.”

Material:

“The government ought not to be spending money on untested, unproven research when it could be funding recognized, proven sources of improvement, such as the Canadian Cancer Society or Muscular Dystrophy Canada.”

Issue Considerations (Both countries)

Government Spending on Social Programs

1. Whether or not people in this country are trapped in economic conditions they are powerless to improve.
2. Whether or not people in this country are suffering.
3. Whether or not economic growth requires low taxes and no spending deficits.
4. Whether or not government funds can be better spent in other areas.

Stem Cell Research

1. Whether or not embryos are human life that cannot be destroyed.
2. Whether or not people will enjoy many scientific benefits as a result of this research.
3. The cost of the research and the whether the government to afford such an investment.

4. How appropriate it is to use tax-payer money for something that many citizens might find offensive because it violates their religious principles.

Consequences (Both countries)

Government Spending on Social Programs

1. Conditions for the poor would worsen.
2. The economy would improve.
3. Taxes would decrease.
4. If funding for social programs is cut, more people will become self-reliant and find jobs.

Stem Cell Research

1. Stem cell research will lead to the discovery of cures for many diseases.
2. Stem cell research will lead to a greater number of abortions.
3. Stem cell research will have a negative effect on the government's budget.
4. Adult stem cell research that does not require embryos will lead to similar discoveries.