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Mitigating welfare-related prejudice and partisanship among U.S. conservatives with moral reframing of a universal basic income policy[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Inequality and deep poverty have risen sharply in the US since the 1990s. Simultaneously, cash-based welfare policies have frayed, support for public assistance has fallen on the political right, and prejudice against recipients of welfare has remained high. Yet, in recent years Universal Basic Income (UBI) has gained traction, a policy proposing to give all citizens cash sufficient to meet basic needs with no strings attached. We hypothesized that UBI can mitigate the partisanship and prejudice that define the existing welfare paradigm in the US but that this potential depends critically on the narratives attached to it. Indeed, across three online experiments with US adults (total $N = 1888$), we found that communicating the novel policy features of UBI alone were not sufficient to achieve bipartisan support for UBI or overcome negative stereotyping of its recipients. However, when UBI was described as advancing the more conservative value of financial freedom, conservatives perceived the policy to be more aligned with their values and were less opposed to the policy (meta-analytic effect on policy support: $d = 0.36$ [95% CI: 0.27 to 0.46]). Extending the literatures on moral reframing and cultural match, we further find that this values-aligned policy narrative mitigated prejudice among conservatives, reducing negative welfare-related stereotyping of policy recipients (meta-analytic effect $d = -0.27$ [95% CI: -0.38 to -0.16]), while increasing affiliation with them. Together, these findings point to moral reframing as a promising means by which institutional narratives can be used to bridge partisan divides and reduce prejudice.

1. Introduction

Both economic inequality and deep poverty have risen in the United States since the 1990s (Brady & Parolin, 2020; Edin & Shaefer, 2016; Saez & Zucman, 2016). Over the same period, the reach of cash-based welfare policies for the poorest citizens has fallen (Edin & Shaefer, 2016; Shaefer, Edin, Fusaro, & Wu, 2019), as has public support for such policies on the political right (AP-NORC Center, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2017). Yet in recent years, a cash-based policy called Universal Basic Income (UBI) has been gaining traction worldwide, arising from growing global evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfers in alleviating poverty and enhancing well-being (Bastagli et al., 2019;

Haushofer & Shapiro, 2016; Marinescu, 2018). Unlike existing welfare policies, UBI policies are universal, giving all citizens regular cash payments sufficient to meet basic needs, and unconditional, giving cash with no strings attached (Bidadanure, 2019). Given these novel features, UBI may provide a novel opportunity to overcome the existing welfare paradigm in the United States, which is plagued by partisan opposition and prejudice. However, we theorized that this potential would depend not only on the objective policy features of UBI but also the narratives attached to it.

Many factors may contribute to public opposition to cash-based welfare policies, including doubts about their effectiveness, zero-sum beliefs, and fairness concerns (see SM Fig. S1). One important

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determinant is prejudicial ideas about welfare recipients, which have been cultivated in American society, particularly in conservative politics and culture. These gained an iron grip on the American psyche with the trope of the freeloading ‘welfare queen’ (Gilens, 2000; Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006). Today, welfare recipients are one of the most negatively viewed groups in America (see Fig. 1), with recipients often viewed as lazy, dependent, and irresponsible and with welfare itself blamed for creating a culture of dependence (Banerjee, Hanna, Kreindler, & Olken, 2017; Brown-Iannuzzi, Dotsch, Cooley, & Payne, 2017; Henry et al., 2004; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). Although UBI would be distinct from welfare in terms of several policy features, such as being available to all citizens, it is similar to welfare in being a form of cash-based government assistance. Thus, we theorized that UBI and UBI recipients will also be vulnerable to current representations of welfare, yet we also theorize that this is not inevitable. Rather, we propose that welfare-related prejudice may be averted for UBI recipients, particularly so when the policy narrative communicates UBI in terms of the moral values that conservatives endorse.

The narratives that accompany institutional policies can communicate ideas about what values matter and the characteristics of certain social groups (Feinberg & Willer, 2019; Shnabel, Dovidio, & Levin, 2016; Tankard & Paluck, 2017; Thomas, Otis, Abraham, Markus, & Walton, 2020; Walton & Brady, 2020). For instance, the name of the main cash welfare program in the US, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) implies that assistance should be temporary, because people may become dependent, and highlights recipients’ neediness (Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Boudreau, 2019; Stuber & Kronebusch, 2004; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006; Sykes, Kriz, Edin, & Halpern-Meeke, 2015). In this way, such institutional narratives can perpetuate prejudicial views, including negative stereotypes, of recipients of government assistance. While most interventions take a direct approach to prejudice-reduction by targeting individuals and their personal

perceptions of outgroup members (Paluck, Porat, Clark, & Green, 2021), we view the prejudice directed against recipients of public assistance as derived, at least in part, from these broader societal narratives. Therefore, we assess the effect of policy narratives as an institutional- rather than individual-level intervention (Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Thomas et al., 2020).

The primary narrative we test emphasizes the opportunity for UBI to expand individual financial freedom. In doing so, we seek to explicate the alignment of UBI with conservative core values. This approach draws on a technique called ‘moral reframing’ (Feinberg & Willer, 2015, 2019), as well as a related literatures on cultural match and values harnessing (Bryan, 2021; Markus, 2016; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Past research in these areas finds that achieving moral fit, or alignment with core values of one’s cultural group, can be a powerful persuasive and motivational force. In moral reframing, social policies are described as advancing the moral foundations of those typically in opposition to a policy, whether political conservatives (e.g., advancing the values of loyalty, respect for authority, or purity) or political liberals (e.g., advancing the values of fairness or equality) (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt, 2012).

While moral reframing has been found to increase bipartisan support across a range of social policies, including safety net policies like universal health care, UBI may be particularly ripe for moral reframing for three reasons. First, attitudes towards new policy proposals may be more malleable than those towards existing policies. Second, UBI-like, cash-based policies have historically seen bipartisan support, with both conservative economist Dr. Milton Friedman and civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. arguing that such policies would promote the American value of freedom (Foner, 2000; Hamedani, Markus, & Fu, 2013; Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012). Third and relatedly, UBI can be authentically represented in terms of advancing personal financial freedom, which may not be the case for all social policies. Yet

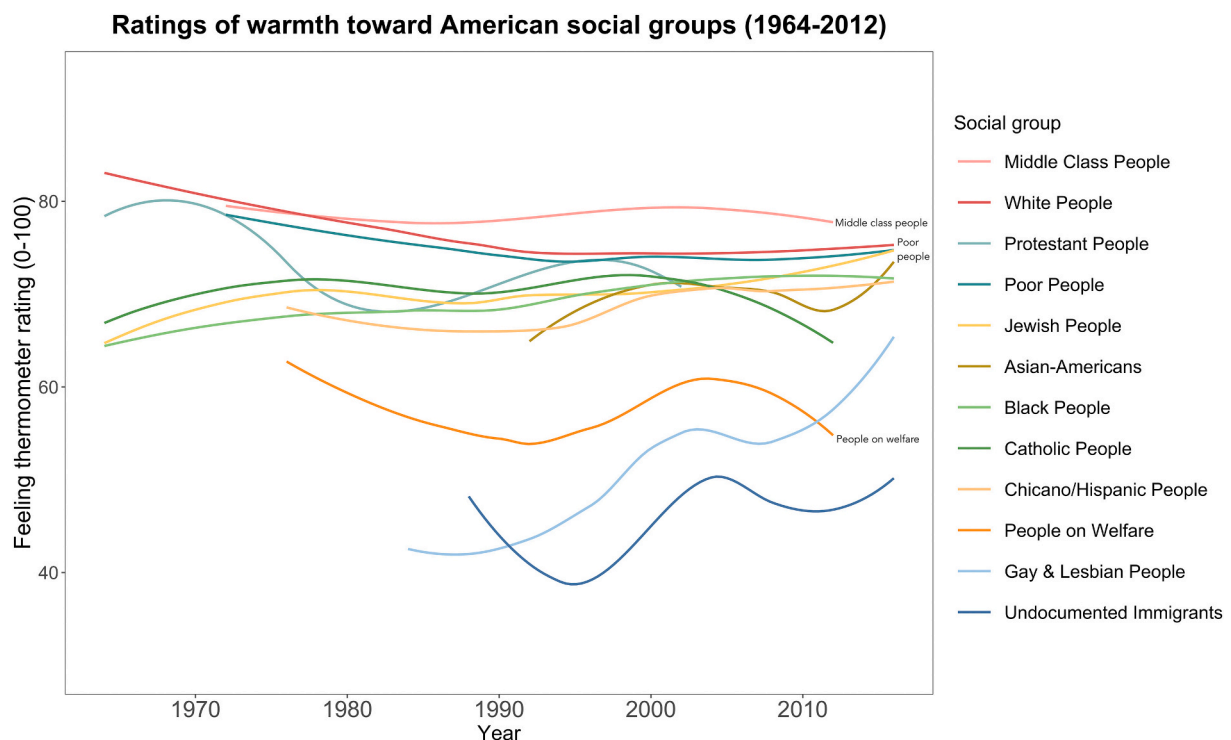


Fig. 1. Feeling thermometer ratings towards select social groups in the US between 1964 and 2016 (secondary analysis of ANES data).

The data presented in this figure are from a secondary analysis of data from the American National Election Study (ANES) – Cumulative ($N = 59,944$). Feeling thermometer questions ask respondents to rate their feelings toward certain groups, particularly how cold / unfavorable they feel to how warm / favorable they feel (0–100 degrees). The social group labels were altered from the original ANES survey in line with principles of inclusive language and are ordered according to their overall averages over time, given available data. Feeling thermometer ratings toward people on welfare were not collected in the 2016 wave. The data and original materials were retrieved from Survey Documentation and Analysis (SDA) archives (American National Election Studies, 2021).

despite this bipartisan potential, liberals currently position UBI as a way to advance the liberal value of caring for and protecting the vulnerable, a value less endorsed by conservatives (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt, 2012).

Our goal was to (re)develop a narrative rooted in freedom for UBI that would build bipartisan support for UBI and reduce prejudice against recipients. While freedom has been less tested in the existing moral reframing literature, it has been proposed as an additional moral foundation (Feinberg & Willer, 2019; Iyer et al., 2012). Our choice of financial freedom in particular was guided by Iyer et al. (2012) who showed that, while both liberals and conservatives highly endorse the value of liberty, or freedom, conservatives are particularly likely to endorse economic freedom and liberals to endorse social or 'lifestyle' freedom. Consistent with the conservative form, Friedman argued that an advantage of cash-based assistance is to "avoid interference with personal freedom," particularly from the government (Friedman, 1967). Here, we hypothesized that situating UBI as promoting the value of personal freedom ("helping individuals have greater autonomy in their decisions and in their lives") would engender greater conservative, and thus bipartisan, support.¹

Extending the moral reframing literature, which has focused primarily on achieving bipartisan support for social policies, our second hypothesis was that moral reframing would be an effective, indirect approach to prejudice reduction. We hypothesize that a freedom-based narrative would mitigate negative, welfare-related stereotyping of recipients of UBI and increase social affiliation with them. While perceptions of UBI recipients should, statistically, reflect perceptions of the average citizen given UBI's universal nature, a literature in social cognition finds that people's mental representations, or stereotypic exemplars, of social categories are often not statistically accurate. This bias has been well-documented for recipients of public assistance (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). Thus, we anticipated that representations of and attitudes toward UBI recipients would be shaped, in part, by stereotypes of welfare recipients, as both are recipients of public assistance. However, we also theorized that a values-aligned narrative could shape conservatives' representations of UBI recipients to reflect more positive and inclusive views.

Though we do not empirically distinguish among them here, several mechanisms are consistent with this hypothesis. First, a policy narrative provides an overarching way to understand a policy, its purpose, and its recipients. If this narrative situates the policy's primary purpose as advancing a person's core values, it may prevent alternative purposes or associations from coming to mind, such as pejorative representations of recipients (e.g., as "lazy") (cf. Okonofua, Harris, & Walton, 2022). Second, embedding values in a policy message may serve as a values affirmation. Research in identity threat finds that affirming a person's values can ease threats to self-adequacy and, subsequently, reduce stereotyping and outgroup derogation and increase ideological flexibility (Cohen et al., 2007; Fein & Spencer, 1997). In this way, moral reframing may make people more receptive to forming new beliefs and attitudes. Finally, people could infer that, by participating in the policy, recipients share or, at least, acquiesce to the value being advanced by it, facilitating a sense of a shared identity and social affiliation with recipients (Launay & Dunbar, 2015). Such feelings of closeness and shared identity have been shown to contribute to reductions in prejudicial attitudes and zero-sum beliefs towards outgroups (Davies, Tropp, Aron,

¹ A study by Yeung (2022) published as we completed revisions to this manuscript tested somewhat similar messaging strategies that also sought to increase bipartisan potential for UBI. These strategies highlighted objective policy features that align with conservative policy preferences, namely laissez-faire and limited government. In contrast to their key manipulations which represented different qualities of UBI as policy "features," the narrative manipulations presented here focused on the moral goals of UBI, namely advancing the value of freedom.

Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011; Esses, Dovidio, Jackson, & Armstrong, 2001; Shnabel et al., 2016; Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2002).

These studies add to the social psychological literature in three primary ways. First, we link the moral reframing and cultural match literatures to research on prejudice and stereotyping. Second, we reveal a means to mitigate prejudice against one of the most negatively viewed social groups in the US—welfare recipients. Third, we add to the prejudice reduction literature by testing a promising institutional-level intervention, that of policy narratives.

Experiment 1 compares two values-based policy messages against a message communicating the policy details alone among US liberals and conservatives. It examines effects on support for UBI and prejudicial beliefs about policy recipients, specifically stereotypical beliefs that recipients would become dependent on UBI. Experiment 2 replicates the effect of a freedom-based message on support for UBI among conservatives and, further, examines additional measures of prejudice, including negative stereotyping of recipients (e.g., as "lazy") and feelings of affiliation towards them. It also compares this freedom-based message to a message that recasts the qualities of policy recipients more explicitly ("freedom plus"). Experiment 3 replicates key effects of the freedom-based message from Experiments 1 and 2 and benchmarks its effects on views of UBI recipients to views of current welfare recipients.

2. Experiment 1

With a sample of liberals and conservatives, Experiment 1 examined whether a message that represented UBI as aimed at advancing financial freedom would increase the degree to which conservatives saw the policy as fitting with their values (*moral fit*), supported UBI, and rejected welfare-related prejudicial beliefs about policy recipients, specifically *stereotypical dependence beliefs*. We compared this "Financial Freedom" message and a status quo "Social Security for All" message—grounded in the liberal value of care for the vulnerable—to a message that simply provided the policy details. This initial experiment was not pre-registered.

2.1. Methods and materials

2.1.1. Participants

We recruited US adults on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to understand policy views with a broad sample of Americans. For this and subsequent studies, sample size was determined before any data collection. While this was a convenience sample, survey experiments conducted on MTurk tend to show similar results to those conducted with nationally representative samples (Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2015). A total of 642 participants completed the survey. To screen out low-quality data, participants who did not respond "Yes" to "In your honest opinion, should we use your data and responses?" were excluded ($N = 14$ total, by condition: $N = 5$ in freedom, $N = 3$ in security, $N = 6$ in control).² The final sample included 628 consenting participants. A sensitivity power analysis finds a minimum detectable effect size of $d = 0.27$ between conditions, based on 80% power and alpha level of 0.05.

The sample averaged 35.2 years of age; 46.7% identified as female, 52.7% male, and 0.6% another category; 75.5% as White, 8.3% Black, 7.5% Asian, 5.4% Hispanic, and 3.3% another category; 44.6% had a Bachelor's degree or more education, 43.6% some college, 11.8% a high school degree or less; and the modal annual household income was \$25,000–\$50,000 (see SM Table S1.1 for full reporting). Participants were 42.5% Democrat, 20.4% Republican, 32.5% Independent, and 4.6% Other. On a 1–7 scale with 1 indicating 'strongly liberal' and 7 indicating 'strongly conservative,' the sample skewed slightly liberal in

² See SM Section 1.2 for a discussion of survey attrition.

political ideology ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.74$). Supporting the success of random assignment, we find no differences across conditions on these sociodemographic characteristics (see SM Table S1.1). All procedures for this and subsequent experiments were approved by the ethics board at Stanford University.

2.1.2. Procedure and manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to read about a UBI policy communicated in one of three ways: the control condition with objective policy details alone (“Basic Income”), or one of two values-based messages (“Financial Freedom” or “Social Security for All”). The objective policy details were held constant across all three conditions.

The “Basic Income” policy message (control) condition described the details of a basic income policy alone (“The ‘Basic Income’ policy would streamline many government programs and provide a single, efficient monthly payment to all citizens, regardless of employment status, sufficient to cover basic needs”).

The values-based messages included the same policy details and additionally characterized the goal of the policy in advancing a particular value. The “Financial Freedom” message (“freedom message”) described how the policy would promote individual autonomy and freedom (“Freedom is an important value for Americans... The goal of this ‘Financial Freedom’ policy is get the government out of deciding which services are available to people and instead, enable individuals to decide for themselves how to best meet their needs”).

The “Social Security for All” policy message (“security message”) communicated a narrative about security and protecting people from harm by providing economic security in a changing economy (“Security is an important value for Americans... The goal of this ‘Social Security for All’ program is to protect Americans and their families against financial shocks such as job losses”). SM Section 1.1 includes the full text for all policy messages.

2.1.3. Measures

2.1.3.1. Manipulation and attention checks. For the manipulation check, two independent research assistants coded responses to an open-ended question asked directly after the manipulation: “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not.” RAs coded for the presence or absence of mentions of freedom and security (see Table S1.4 for definition and examples). After five rounds of coding ($kappa = 0.84$), each RA coded half of the remaining data. The attention check asked participants to select the correct eligibility criteria for being a recipient of the policy. Manipulation checks and attention checks are described in SM Section 1.6.

2.1.3.2. Political ideology. Political ideology was measured as the primary moderator of condition effects, in line with the moral reframing literature. It was an average of two items ($1 = Strongly liberal$, $7 = Strongly conservative$): “Please indicate your political identity on social issues (e.g., abortion, gun rights, gay rights). I am __ on social issues” and “Please indicate your political identity on economic issues (e.g., taxation, government spending). I am __ on economic issues”; adapted from Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2017) and Feinberg and Willer (2015); $r(626) = 0.75$, $p < .001$.

2.1.3.3. Policy attitudes and beliefs. The primary outcome, *policy support*, was assessed with a single item: “To what extent do you support or oppose [policy title]?” from $1 = Oppose a great deal$ to $7 = Support a great deal$.

Building on inoculation theory within the persuasion literature (Compton & Pfau, 2005), we also tested the strength of participants’ support for the policy through the resilience of their support for it: whether participants would show ‘inoculation’ against (i.e., disagree with) common counterarguments to UBI they could encounter in

everyday life. For this *resistance to counterarguments* measure, we showed participants six counterarguments commonly levied against public assistance policies and asked them how much they agreed or disagreed with each (e.g., “Some argue that this policy would undermine American values of meritocracy and hard work by giving people unearned money,” $1 = Strongly disagree$ to $7 = Strongly agree$ with the argument, reverse-coded, $\alpha = 0.92$).³

As an additional indicator of positive policy attitudes, we also assessed how much participants rejected (versus endorsed) zero-sum beliefs about the policy—that it would benefit only the least well off at the expense of others (3 items, e.g., “This program would only benefit the least well off,” $1 = Strongly disagree$ to $7 = Strongly agree$, $\alpha = 0.72$).

2.1.3.4. Prejudicial attitudes and beliefs: Stereotypical dependence beliefs.

We assessed how much participants endorsed stereotypical beliefs about recipients of UBI as dependent on, as opposed to empowered by, cash welfare (5 items, e.g., “A basic income program would promote laziness by giving people unearned money,” $1 = Strongly disagree$ to $7 = Strongly agree$, $\alpha = 0.91$). Such beliefs have been found to be associated with bias against and dehumanization of welfare recipients (Cooley et al., 2019; Schroeder, Waytz, & Epley, 2017).

2.1.3.5. Process variable. As our primary process variable, we assessed *perceived moral fit*, or how much participants perceived the policy as aligning with their values (3 items assessing how much the policy is “consistent with your values,” “fair,” and “important,” $1 = Not at all$ to $5 = Extremely$, $\alpha = 0.92$).

2.1.3.6. Supplementary measures. As supplementary measures, we assessed participants’ *desire to receive* the policy themselves; open-ended *thoughts* about the policy, which participants self-categorized as *supporting* or *opposing* the policy; *perceived policy effectiveness*; and *supportive affect* (see SM Section 1.7).

For Experiments 1–3, we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions in the main text or SM, with the exception of a small number of measures designated *a priori* as exploratory within the study materials (Experiment 1) or pre-registration (Experiment 2), including Protestant Work Ethic, cultural independence, and empathic concern.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Analytic strategy

For all outcomes, we conducted multiple regression analyses interacting message condition with political ideology. All analyses were conducted with the full sample using the software R (R Core Team, 2020). Analyses showed highly to marginally significant interactions between condition and political ideology on all dependent variables ($ps < 0.10$), supporting simple slopes analyses. These were driven by significant interactions with the freedom condition (and not the security condition) compared to the control ($ps < 0.10$) (see Table 1). We report simple slopes analyses for conservatives (at the value of $6 = Moderately$

³ To ensure that participants indeed interpreted this measure as one of personal agreement or disagreement with counterarguments as intended, rather than a perception of the frequency of such arguments, we ran a pilot study ($N = 49$) with these items and asked respondents, first, “If someone were to mark ‘agree’ with the questions above, what would they be indicating? Please describe in your own words.” Coding revealed that only 11% of respondents reported interpreting the question as referring to the frequency of such arguments made by others. Second, we asked respondents, “Imagine someone marked that they ‘Strongly agree’ with the statements above. Do you think this person would be indicating: $1 = I$ personally agree with this argument or $2 = I$ agree that some people make this argument” (the order was counter-balanced across participants). Here, a strong majority chose the first option (71%), our intended interpretation.

conservative) and for liberals (at the value of 2 = *Moderately liberal*). While simple slopes analyses represent predicted values, we refer to these results as mean effects for ‘conservatives’ and for ‘liberals’ for simplicity of reporting. We report multiple-hypothesis corrected p -values, using Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995), computed for all condition comparisons within each analysis category (interaction effects, conservative simple effects, liberal simple effects) on all main outcome variables (see Table 1 and Tables S1.2–1.3).

2.2.2. Manipulation and attention checks

When we coded responses to the question “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not,” we found that, respectively, the freedom condition increased references to freedom-related themes and the security condition increased references to security-related themes compared to the control. An example of a freedom-coded response is “Yes, this mostly reflects my values. I believe that everyone should have the freedom to make their own financial decisions” and of a security-coded response is “Yes, it does. Financial security is a thing that many people struggle with, and having a policy to protect them is a great idea.” We also found that the vast majority of participants passed the attention check, and we retained all participants in analyses (see SM Section 1.6 for details on both outcomes).

2.2.3. Policy attitudes and beliefs

As hypothesized, on the primary measure of support, there was an interaction between political ideology and condition, $F(2,622) = 8.41$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$, which was driven by an interaction between the freedom and control conditions, $t(622) = 3.69$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.30$ (see Table 1 and Fig. 2). By contrast, there was no interaction with the security versus control message, $t(622) = 0.37$, $p = .823$, $d = 0.03$.

Simple slopes analyses showed that the freedom message significantly increased support for UBI among conservatives, shifting the average from moderate opposition in the control condition ($M = 3.08$) to slightly above the scale midpoint in the freedom condition ($M = 4.24$), $p = .003$, $d = 0.30$. The security message, which advanced liberal-leaning values, had no effect on policy support among conservatives ($M = 3.28$) relative to the control condition, $p = .693$. In contrast to conservatives, liberals supported UBI moderately to strongly in all three conditions, and neither message significantly differed from the control condition ($M_{Control} = 5.91$, $M_{Freedom} = 5.66$), $p = .875$, ($M_{Security} = 5.97$), $p = .902$. See full statistical reporting in SM Tables S1.2 and S1.3 for conservative and liberal simple slope analyses, respectively.

Probing the robustness of support for UBI, we find that, for conservatives, the freedom message significantly increased *resistance to counterarguments* against UBI ($M_{Control} = 2.67$, $M_{Freedom} = 3.29$), $p = .034$, while the security message had no effect ($M = 2.60$), $p = .897$ (see Fig. 3). In contrast, as with policy support, liberals did not differ by condition, showing similarly high levels of resistance to counterarguments across conditions ($M_{Control} = 5.06$, $M_{Freedom} = 4.90$), $p = .875$, ($M_{Security} = 4.80$), $p = .875$.

As shown in Fig. 3, conservatives in the freedom message condition were also less likely to endorse zero-sum beliefs about UBI ($M = 3.51$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.22$); that is, they were less likely to see UBI as benefiting only the least well off, $p = .008$. The security message showed no such effect ($M = 4.17$), $p = .897$. Liberals again did not differ by condition, showing similarly low endorsement of zero-sum beliefs across conditions ($M_{Control} = 2.45$, $M_{Freedom} = 2.37$), $p = .875$, ($M_{Security} = 2.49$), $p = .902$.

2.2.4. Prejudicial attitudes and beliefs: Stereotypical dependence beliefs

In addition to viewing the policy more positively, conservatives saw recipients of the policy more positively in the freedom condition. Compared to the control message ($M = 4.95$), conservatives in the freedom condition were less likely to believe that recipients would become dependent on UBI ($M = 4.22$), $p = .008$. The security message showed no such effect ($M = 4.84$), $p = .788$, (see Fig. 3). Liberals did not

differ by condition, showing similarly low endorsement of stereotypical dependence beliefs ($M_{Control} = 2.46$, $M_{Freedom} = 2.65$), $p = .875$, ($M_{Security} = 2.62$), $p = .875$.

2.2.5. Process variable

As predicted, the freedom message increased the perceived moral fit of UBI among conservatives ($M = 3.08$) compared to the control condition ($M = 2.40$), $p = .003$, while the security message had no effect ($M = 2.41$), $p = .960$. By contrast, liberals’ perceived moral fit did not vary across conditions, as they reported high moral fit, approaching ceiling, across all conditions ($M_{Control} = 4.13$, $M_{Freedom} = 4.04$), $p = .875$, ($M_{Security} = 4.11$), $p = .916$ (see SM Tables S1.2–1.3).

We examined whether the measure of moral fit mediated the effects of moral reframing on policy support consistent with our theoretical pathway. We ran a mediation model, with standardized outcome measures, using the ‘mediation’ package in R with 1000 bootstrapped simulations (Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, & Imai, 2014). For this analysis, instead of conducting simple slopes analyses, we split the sample into self-identified conservatives (i.e., those whose average political ideology score was above the scale midpoint) and self-identified liberals (i.e., those whose average political ideology score was below the scale midpoint). The results were consistent with our hypothesis. There was a significant indirect effect of moral fit on the pathway between condition (0 = control message, 1 = freedom condition) and policy support (Indirect effect = 1.05, 95% CI = [0.36, 1.74], $p = .004$) among conservatives and a non-significant indirect effect among liberals (Indirect effect = -0.05 , 95% CI = [-0.38 , 0.26], $p = .790$). These results are correlational not causal. They illustrate the viability of one possible causal pathway.

2.2.6. Supplementary measures

On most supplementary measures, we found similar patterns of results such that conservatives showed more positive attitudes toward UBI in the freedom condition as compared to the control condition. The freedom condition, and not the security condition, increased conservatives’ *desire to receive* the policy themselves, *supportive thoughts* towards the policy, and *perceived effectiveness* of the policy. Liberals’ ratings were high on all these outcomes and did not show condition differences. The measure of supportive affect did not show condition differences among either conservatives or liberals, suggesting that significant effects of the freedom message on other outcomes were not merely driven by overall affect toward the policy. See full details on these measures in SM Section 1.7.

2.2.7. Discussion

In Experiment 1, representing UBI as a means to advance the value of freedom reduced partisan polarization in response to UBI by increasing support among conservatives. This representation also reduced how much conservatives endorsed stereotypical dependence beliefs about UBI, the idea that recipients would become dependent on the policy. Moreover, the freedom-based message increased the degree to which conservatives perceived the policy as fitting with their moral values, and mediation analyses were consistent with the hypothesis that perceived moral fit mediated the increase in support for UBI among conservatives. The security message, grounded in the liberal moral value of protecting people from harm, did not affect any of these outcomes for conservatives. By contrast, liberals generally supported UBI and reported high moral fit with the policy regardless of condition.

3. Experiment 2

Experiment 2 was a pre-registered study (<https://osf.io/gwru2>) with a larger sample of conservatives, the group that showed the greatest opposition to UBI and endorsed stereotypical dependence beliefs in Experiment 1 the most. In Experiment 2, we assessed the replicability of the freedom-based message on policy support among conservatives. We

Table 1
Interaction effects between condition and political ideology.

Outcome	Overall interaction with condition		Interaction with freedom condition versus control			Interaction with security condition versus control		
	η^2	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Support for UBI policy	0.03	0.002**	0.35	3.69	0.002**	0.04	0.37	0.823
Moral fit	0.02	0.006**	0.19	3.17	0.006**	0.01	0.1	0.922
Resistance to counter-arguments	0.01	0.092	0.19	2.29	0.048*	0.05	0.53	0.743
Zero-sum beliefs	0.01	0.094	-0.16	-2.16	0.059	-0.02	-0.3	0.823
Stereotypical dependence beliefs	0.02	0.021*	-0.23	-3.02	0.008**	-0.07	-0.9	0.500

Note. Columns 1–2 represent results of an ANOVA interacting condition with political ideology. Columns 3–6 represent results of a regression model interacting political ideology with each of the treatment conditions (freedom, security) versus control. All p-values in this table are corrected, as a set, for multiple hypothesis testing using Benjamini-Hochberg procedure.

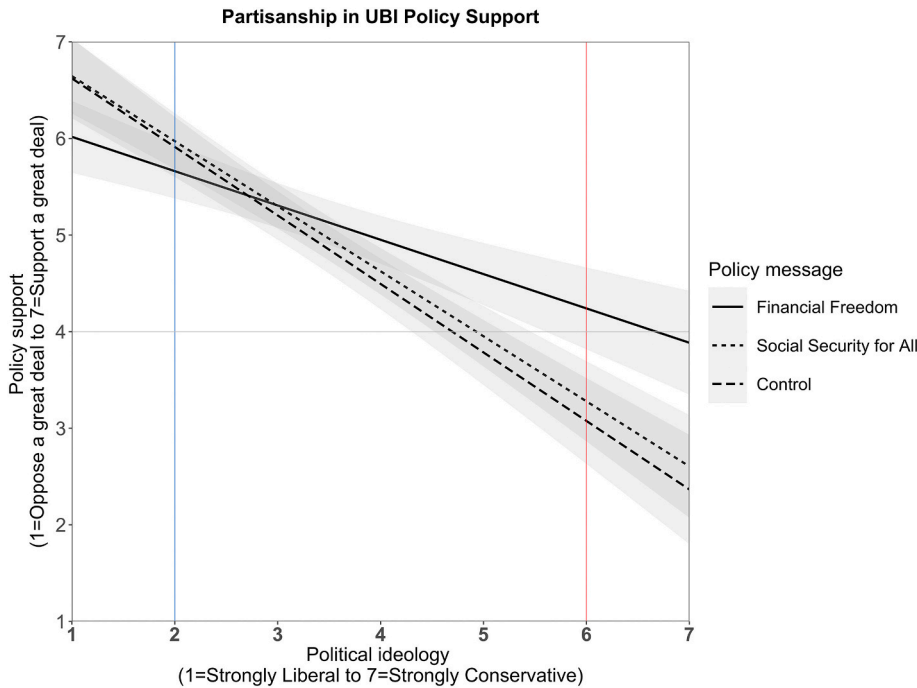


Fig. 2. Describing UBI in terms of financial freedom reduces partisanship in policy support (Experiment 1).

Note. This figure displays the experimental effects of two values-based policy messages, compared to policy details alone, on the relationship between political ideology and policy support. The lines are linear fits with 95% CI ribbons. Vertical lines indicate the values on political ideology of “moderately liberal” (2) and “moderately conservative” (6). The horizontal grey line indicates the scale midpoint “Neither oppose nor support.”

also assessed additional measures of prejudice, including endorsement of *welfare-related stereotypical views* of recipients (e.g., as ‘lazy’ and ‘irresponsible’) and *feelings of social affiliation* with recipients. As noted in the introduction, in doing so we follow a literature on mental representations, which finds that people have stereotypic exemplars, or representations, of members of social categories that may or may not be statistically accurate and that, in turn, influence a range of social judgments (Brown-Jannuzzi et al., 2017). Here, while the typical recipient of a UBI policy would statistically be the average American in all conditions (it is “universal”), we were interested in how much the perceived characteristics of this person would reflect negative stereotypical views associated with welfare recipients (e.g., lazy, irresponsible) or shift towards more positive representations (e.g., hardworking, responsible).

We also tested a message that adds a paragraph to the “Financial Freedom” message designed to directly counter prejudicial beliefs about recipients (e.g., stereotypes of being ‘lazy’) by referencing their ‘talent and drive’ and ability to ‘contribute’ to society. Our goal was to assess whether this “freedom plus” message would enhance the effects of the more indirect approach of moral reframing, an approach that forefronts conservative-aligned values advanced by the policy, on prejudicial beliefs. However, as we will see, addressing the personal qualities of policy recipients in the message did not strengthen but, rather, weakened the effects.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

We recruited participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk with the qualification of US Political Affiliation – Conservative, excluding those who had completed our prior surveys on this topic. A total of 889 participants completed the survey. We excluded participants who did not respond “Yes” to “In your honest opinion, should we use your data and responses?” ($N = 13$, by condition: $N = 3$ in control, $N = 2$ in freedom, $N = 8$ in freedom plus) and who self-reported being non-conservatives (i. e., a political ideology score of 4 or less) ($N = 175$ total, by condition: $N = 50$ in control, $N = 57$ in freedom, $N = 68$ in freedom plus).⁴ The final sample comprised 701 consenting conservatives. A sensitivity power analysis finds this sample yields a minimum detectable effect size of $d = 0.26$ between conditions, based on 80% power and an alpha level of 0.05.

The final sample averaged 42.3 years of age; 64.2% identified as female and 35.8% male; 87.76% as White, 5.6% Black, 2.9% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian, and 1.9% another category; 53.9% had a Bachelor’s degree

⁴ These exclusion criteria reflect our pre-registered design in Experiments 2 and 3. An inferential issue that arises, however, is the possibility of differential attrition across conditions in survey completion. We address this in SM Section 2.2.

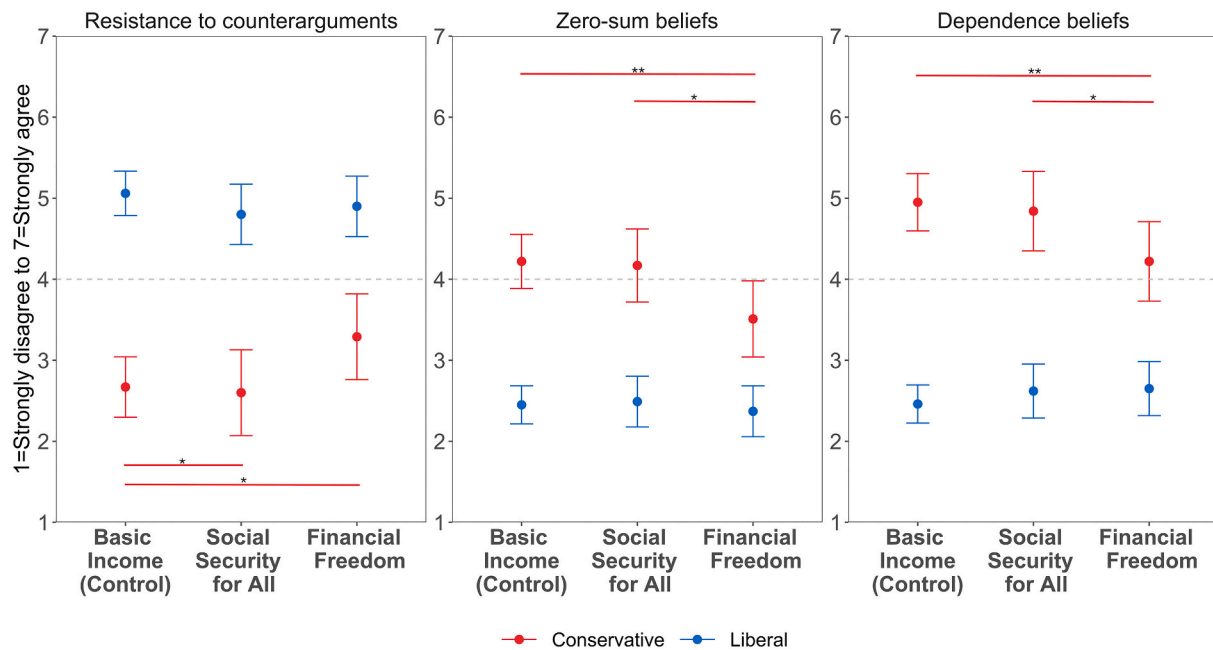


Fig. 3. Describing UBI in terms of financial freedom affects conservatives' but not liberals' attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy and its recipients (Experiment 1).

Note. This graph shows the simple slope estimates at the points of 2 ("moderately liberal") and 6 ("moderately conservative") respectively on a scale from 1 = Strongly liberal to 7 = Strongly conservative. The horizontal dashed line represents the outcome scale midpoint. *P*-values are corrected for multiple-hypothesis testing. Asterisks denote significance in the condition comparison (**p* < .05, ***p* < .01). Error bars are 95% CI.

or more education, 36.9% some college, and 9.1% a high school degree or less; the modal annual household income was \$25,000–\$50,000; 73.2% identified as Republican, 19.3% Independent, 5.0% Democrat, and 2.6% Other. The sample was moderately conservative along the same political ideology measure used in Experiment 1 ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 0.82$). Supporting the success of random assignment, we find no differences across conditions on these sociodemographic characteristics (see SM Table S2.1).

3.1.2. Procedure and manipulation

Similar to Experiment 1, participants were randomly assigned to read one of three policy messages: Universal Basic Income (control), Financial Freedom, or Freedom for Prosperity (which we label here "freedom plus").

The control condition was identical to that in Experiment 1, except that the policy was called the "Universal Basic Income" (UBI) policy rather than the "Basic Income" policy.⁵ The Financial Freedom message was identical to that in Experiment 1.

A third policy message described the "Freedom for Prosperity" policy and included the same "Financial Freedom" message plus a paragraph emphasizing how "with financial freedom, individual Americans can capitalize on their own strengths and on the strength of America – the unique talents and drive of its citizens" and can have "the liberty to pursue their talents" and "the freedom to contribute to our nation's prosperity", which we call the "freedom plus" condition (see SM Section 2.1 for full text).

3.1.3. Measures

3.1.3.1. Manipulation check. As in Experiment 1, after reading one of the three messages, participants were asked how the policy message related to their values, "Does this policy reflect your values? Please

describe why or why not." Full details are presented in SM Section 2.3 for this exploratory measure.

3.1.3.2. Policy attitudes and beliefs. Support for UBI and resistance to counterarguments were measured as in Experiment 1.

Zero-sum beliefs was measured with 9 items, expanding upon the 3 items used in Experiment 1. This measure included items about zero-sum beliefs specific to UBI, as in Experiment 1, and beliefs about social policies more generally, given their loadings on a common factor (e.g., "Every social policy that benefits the poor inherently involves taking something away from the middle class"; 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree, $\alpha = 0.86$; select items adapted from Shnabel et al. (2016)).

3.1.3.3. Prejudicial attitudes and beliefs. Stereotypical dependence beliefs were measured as in Experiment 1.

Two measures assessed negative stereotypes of UBI recipients. First, participants were asked to imagine and describe in a few sentences the "typical recipient" of the UBI policy they had read about. They were then asked to list, in an open-ended manner, 10 characteristics of that person (stereotypical views – qualitative; cf. Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001). Second, as a primary, confirmatory measure of stereotypical views, we asked conservatives to rate the typical recipient they had imagined on three characteristics: "How [lazy/hardworking, responsible/irresponsible, competent/incompetent] is this person?" (6-point scale; $\alpha = 0.87$; Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017).

As a secondary exploratory measure, we conducted text analysis on the characteristics listed to describe UBI recipients (up to 10 characteristics were allowed per respondent). For this, we used a computational text analysis tool, from the package 'sentimentr' in R, which applies a dictionary-based lookup method to rate a string of words on the extent of positive to negative sentiment expressed (Rinker, 2019). This method is able to capture valence shifters in the words and phrases written, including when negators were used (e.g., "not hardworking"). For each of the 10 possible responses per participant, we calculated a sentiment score, with negative values indicating negative sentiment and positive values indicating positive sentiment, and then computed the

⁵ Levels of support were similar for these two control condition messages across Studies 1–2.

Table 2

Effects of UBI policy messages on conservatives' support for UBI and attitudes towards UBI and UBI recipients in Experiment 2.

	Control	Financial Freedom	Freedom Plus	Freedom vs Control		Freedom Plus vs Control		Freedom vs Freedom Plus		
	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	
Policy attitudes and beliefs										
Policy support	2.93 (0.14)	3.90 (0.19)	3.47 (0.20)	5.01	0.38***	2.77	0.21*	2.19	0.17*	
Resistance to counter-arguments	2.81 (0.10)	3.27 (0.14)	2.85 (0.14)	3.29	0.25**	0.32	0.02	2.91	0.22**	
Zero-sum beliefs	4.24 (0.09)	3.73 (0.13)	4.11 (0.13)	-4.08	-0.31***	-1.03	-0.08	-3.00	-0.23**	
Prejudicial attitudes and beliefs										
Dependence beliefs	4.93 (0.12)	4.29 (0.17)	4.77 (0.17)	-3.79	-0.29**	-0.94	-0.07	-2.80	-0.21*	
Stereotypical views	3.74 (0.10)	3.22 (0.15)	3.44 (0.15)	-3.49	-0.26**	-1.98	-0.15	-1.48	-0.11	
Affiliation	2.82 (0.09)	3.39 (0.13)	3.08 (0.13)	4.48	0.34***	2.03	0.15	2.40	0.18*	
Process variable										
Moral fit	2.20 (0.09)	2.75 (0.12)	2.51 (0.12)	4.49	0.34***	2.53	0.19*	1.91	0.14	

Note. All *p* values are corrected for multiple hypothesis testing using Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001. Means and standard errors are predicted estimates from regression analyses.

average score across all responses for each participant. SM Section 2.3 also reports coding of additional open-ended questions, including on perceived physical characteristics of the recipient.

We assessed feelings of social *affiliation* with UBI recipients with four items: two asked “How [like me/not like me, friendly/unfriendly] is this person?” (6-point scale) and two asked how close the participant felt towards the typical recipient and towards UBI recipients generally using the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale (scaled to 6-point; $\alpha = 0.87$; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

3.1.3.4. *Process variable. Moral fit* was measured as in Experiment 1.

3.1.3.5. *Supplementary measures.* As in Study 1, we also assessed participants' *desire to receive* the policy themselves. Although our primary interest was in effects on views of UBI and its recipients, we considered the possibility of positive spillover effects on attitudes towards people in poverty, measured by *perceived contribution of low-income groups to society* and *willingness to listen to low-income persons* (see SM Section 2.4).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Analytic strategy

We conducted linear regression analyses to assess condition effects. All analyses reported in Experiments 2 and 3 were pre-registered except those marked as exploratory in the text. We report multiple-hypothesis corrected *p*-values using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure, computed across the main effects presented in Table 2.

3.2.2. Manipulation check

When we coded responses to the question “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not,” we found that, while both freedom conditions increased reference to the value of ‘liberty,’ or freedom, compared to the control ($M_{Control} = 11.9\%$, $M_{Freedom} = 39.0\%$, $z(698) = 6.47$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.49$; $M_{Freedom Plus} = 30.0\%$, $z(698) = 4.69$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.35$), the freedom plus condition did so to a lesser extent than the freedom condition ($z(698) = 2.02$, $p = .043$, $d = 0.15$), suggesting that ‘freedom’ became less salient with the additional paragraph addressing the qualities of policy recipients.

3.2.3. Policy attitudes and beliefs

Compared to the control message ($M = 2.93$), both the freedom

message ($M = 3.90$, $p < .001$) and the freedom plus message ($M = 3.47$, $p = .011$) increased support for UBI in our conservative sample (see Table 2 for full statistical reporting). The freedom plus message showed significantly lower impacts compared to the simpler freedom message, $p = .043$.

Conservatives also showed greater *resistance to counterarguments* in the freedom ($M = 3.27$) compared to both the control condition ($M = 2.81$, $p = .003$) and the freedom plus condition ($M = 2.85$, $p = .009$). There was no difference between the latter conditions, $p = .746$. Thus, the additional content in the freedom plus message undermined the inoculation against common counterarguments that had been conferred in the freedom condition.

A similar pattern was observed for *zero-sum beliefs*. Conservatives in the freedom condition were less likely to endorse such beliefs about the policy ($M = 3.73$) compared to both those in the control condition ($M = 4.24$), $p < .001$, replicating Experiment 1, and those in the freedom plus condition ($M = 4.11$), $p = .007$. However, the freedom plus condition did not produce this effect, $p = .336$.

3.2.4. Prejudicial attitudes and beliefs

Replicating the effects observed in Experiment 1, conservatives in the freedom condition were less likely to view recipients as made dependent, rather than empowered, by the receipt of UBI ($M = 4.29$) as compared to the control condition ($M = 4.93$), $p = .001$. However, as with the previous measures, this effect was not observed in the freedom plus condition ($M = 4.77$), $p = .366$. That is, even though the additional paragraph specifically situated recipients as empowered agents, this condition was less effective in mitigating stereotypical dependence beliefs than the base freedom message ($p = .011$).

When we asked conservatives to imagine and then rate the typical UBI recipient, those in the freedom condition showed significantly less negative stereotyping, rating the typical recipient as less irresponsible, incompetent, and lazy ($M = 3.22$) compared to conservatives in the control condition ($M = 3.74$), $p = .002$. The freedom plus condition produced a directional but non-significant effect on negative stereotyping ($M = 3.44$) relative to the control condition, $p = .063$.

When we examined the characteristics that conservatives listed about the typical UBI recipient, we found a similar pattern of results. First, exploratory analyses found that, while the characteristics conservatives included in the control condition were negative in sentiment on average ($M = -0.10$), two-sided *t*-test from zero: $t(242) = -4.24$, $p <$

.001, those they included in the freedom condition were positive on average ($M = 0.07$), two-sided t -test from zero: $t(230) = 2.56, p = .011$, and significantly different than in the control condition, $t(698) = 4.65, p < .001, d = 0.35$. However, in the freedom plus condition, the descriptions that conservatives wrote were neutral on average ($M = 0.00$), two-sided t -test from zero: $t(226) = 0.09, p = .925$. While they were significantly more positive than in the control condition, $t(698) = 2.81, p = .005, d = 0.21$, they were directionally, though not significantly, more negative than in the freedom condition, $t(698) = -1.80, p = .072, d = -0.14$.

To better understand these results, we identified the six most common words used by conservatives in each condition (Fig. 4). In the control condition, five of the top six descriptors were negative in sentiment (e.g., “unmotivated,” “poor”; shown in red). In contrast, in the freedom condition five were positive (“kind,” “caring”; shown in teal). Focusing on “lazy,” the most commonly used single characteristic across conditions, conservatives were less likely to use “lazy” to describe UBI recipients in the freedom condition ($M = 28.1\%$ of participants) than in the control condition ($M = 45.7\%$), $z(698) = -3.92, p < .001, d = -0.30$. However, in the freedom plus condition, “lazy” returned to the top of the list of characteristics ($M = 41.0\%$), used more often than in the freedom condition, $z(698) = 2.88, p = .004, d = 0.22$, and no less often than in the control condition, $z(698) = -1.03, p = .303, d = -0.08$.

In addition to mitigating stereotypical representations of UBI recipients, the freedom message significantly increased conservatives’ affiliation with recipients ($M = 3.39$) compared to both the control ($M = 2.82$), $p < .001$, and the freedom plus message ($M = 3.08$), $p = .027$. In many open-ended responses, participants in the freedom condition described the recipient as being similar to themselves (e.g., “The typical person probably looks like me. He/she is hard working, yet makes little money for what they do.”). By contrast, in the freedom plus condition, participants felt only directionally but not significantly greater affiliation with recipients than in the control condition, $p = .060$.

3.2.5. Process variable

Both freedom messages increased perceived moral fit with the policy compared to the control message ($M_{Control} = 2.20, M_{Freedom} = 2.75$), $p < .001$, ($M_{Freedom Plus} = 2.51$), $p = .020$. The freedom condition showed directionally, though not significantly, higher moral fit than the freedom plus condition, $p = .070$.

Pre-registered analyses replicated the mediation of the effects on policy support through moral fit, replicating Experiment 1 among conservatives. There were significant indirect effects of moral fit on the relationship between the freedom condition (0 = control message, 1 = freedom condition) and increased policy support (Indirect effect = 0.37, 95% CI = [0.21, 0.52], $p < .001$) (see Fig. 5).

A post-hoc analysis explored whether moral fit could also account for reduced prejudicial beliefs about recipients. In doing so, we focused on our measures of stereotypical views of recipients as well as feelings of affiliation with them as these relate most directly to their marginalization as a social group. For both measures, we found support for this mediating hypothesis (respectively: Indirect effect = -0.27 , 95% CI = $[-0.40, -0.16]$, $p < .001$; Indirect effect = 0.28 , 95% CI = $0.17, 0.42]$, $p < .001$). See Fig. 5.

We also conducted the same analyses comparing the freedom plus and control conditions. Here, we also found a significant indirect effect of moral fit on policy support (Indirect effect = 0.21 , 95% CI = $[0.05, 0.38]$, $p = .006$). Further, while the freedom plus condition did not significantly reduce stereotypical views of recipients or increase affiliation with them, we found significant indirect effects of moral fit on both outcomes (respectively, Indirect effect = -0.16 , 95% CI = $[-0.28, -0.03]$, $p = .024$ and Indirect effect = 0.16 , 95% CI = $0.03, 0.29]$, $p = .010$). The results are consistent with the possibility that an unassessed third variable suppressed improvement in views of policy recipients in the freedom plus condition, counteracting the positive effect of greater moral fit.

3.2.6. Supplementary measures

Both freedom conditions increased conservatives’ desire to receive the UBI policy themselves. We found no condition differences on attitudes

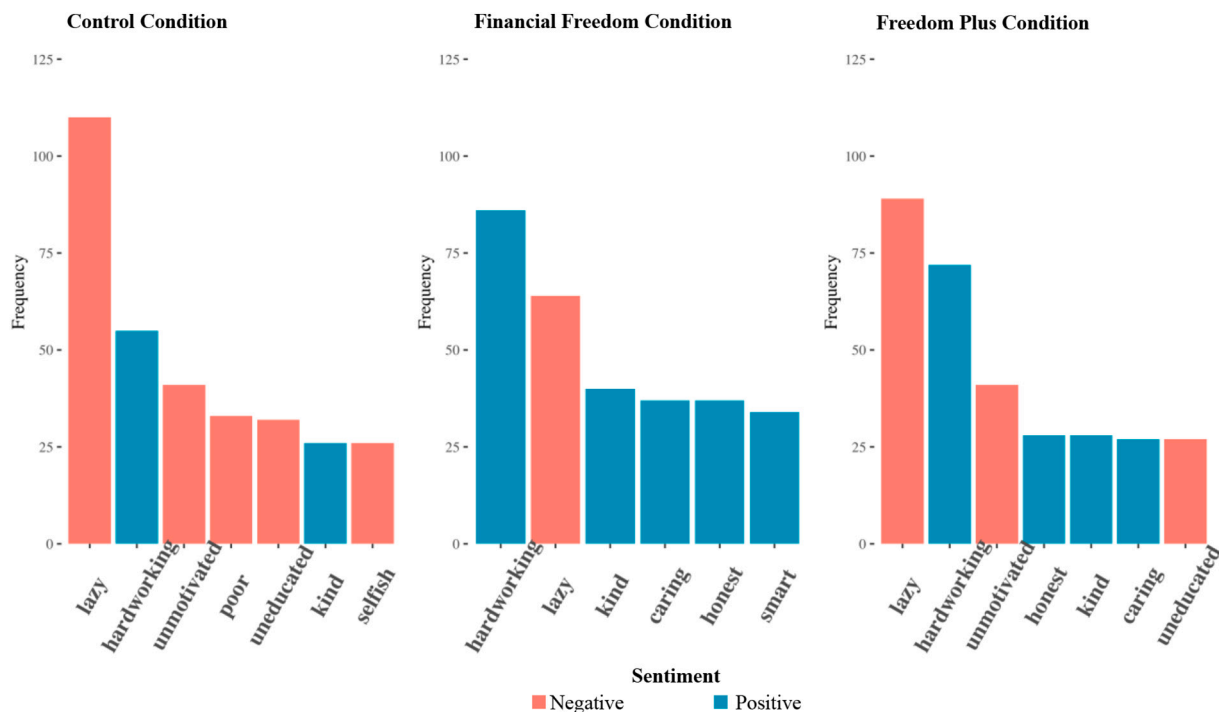


Fig. 4. The most common words used by conservatives to describe the typical UBI recipient within each policy message condition in Experiment 2.

Note. Respondents were asked to list 10 possible characteristics to describe the typical recipient of UBI. Frequency on the y-axis is the number of times within each condition that respondents wrote the descriptor listed on the x axis. For top used words, minor variants of top terms were combined (e.g., ‘hard worker’ to ‘hardworking’).

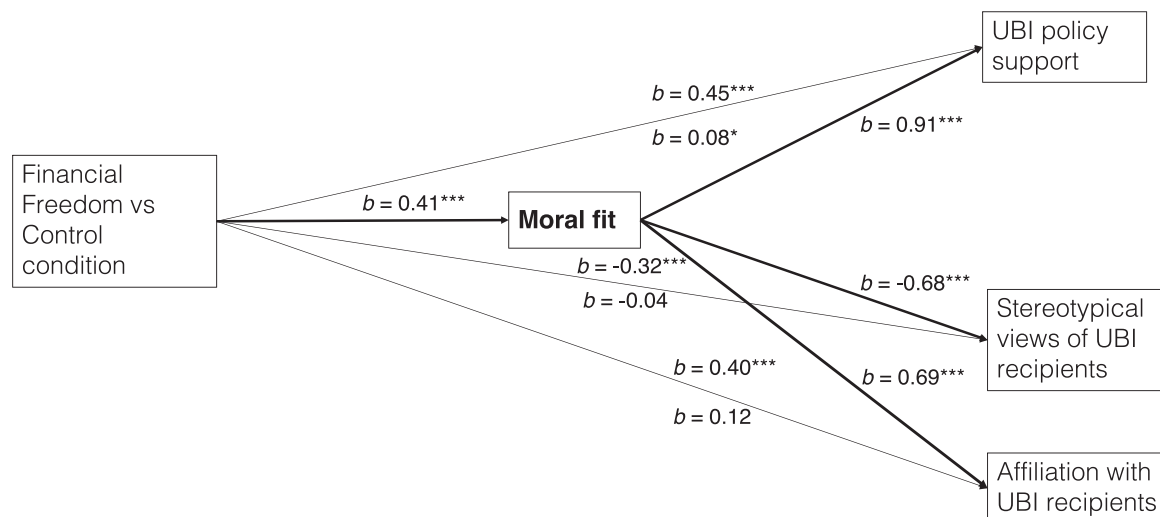


Fig. 5. Statistical mediation of the effect of the financial freedom condition on support for UBI, stereotypical views of UBI recipients, and affiliation with UBI recipients through increased perceived moral fit among conservatives in Experiment 2.

Note. Outcome variables are standardized. Paths stemming from the experimental condition box on the topmost line are interpreted as causal and all others as correlational. Asterisks indicate statistical significance (* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$).

towards people in poverty. See SM Section 2.4 for full details.

3.3. Discussion

Replicating Experiment 1, Experiment 2 again found that the freedom message increased support for UBI among conservatives. Moreover, Experiment 2 extends the literature on moral reframing (Feinberg & Willer, 2019) by demonstrating improvement on another dimension—reducing prejudice against policy recipients. Here, the freedom message mitigated negative stereotypical views of UBI recipients and increased feelings of affiliation with UBI recipients.

A striking finding in Experiment 2 was that the freedom plus condition yielded muted and less consistent effects, despite the fact that this condition differed from the freedom condition only in the inclusion of content designed to explicitly counter negative stereotypes of policy recipients. Although this condition also increased moral fit and policy support, it did so to a lesser extent than the freedom condition. Moreover, it did not improve attitudes toward policy recipients. We believe that two processes may account for these results. First, the additional content may have distracted from the focus on values in the freedom message, consistent with the weaker effects on perceived moral fit and mentions of freedom-related themes in the manipulation check. Second, by drawing attention to the qualities of policy recipients, the freedom plus message may have led conservatives to draw on their pejorative default views of recipients. Consistent with this interpretation, the freedom plus condition restored “lazy” to the top of the list of characteristics that participants used to describe UBI recipients, as in the control condition. If so, the partial activation of pejorative stereotypes about recipients may have suppressed benefits of the perceived moral fit of the policy, an inference that is consistent with the presence of indirect but not direct effects in process analyses involving the freedom plus condition on measures of prejudice.

Together, these findings imply that moral reframing may be effective due to its focus on the policy’s positive aspirational values that are consistent with conservative moral foundations and, thus, its more indirect approach to prejudice reduction.

4. Experiment 3

Experiments 1–2 showed that the narrative communicating the moral goals of UBI matters above and beyond the objective policy details in

affecting support for UBI and prejudicial beliefs about its recipients. Experiment 3, which was pre-registered (<https://osf.io/uvwk4>), again compares the “Financial Freedom” message to the policy details alone among conservatives. However, here we benchmark views of UBI recipients to views of current welfare recipients, using a 2 (freedom vs. policy details alone, between-subjects) \times 2 (views of UBI vs. welfare recipients, within-subjects) mixed-model design. Given that UBI is a form of cash-based public assistance, we expected that recipients of UBI would be vulnerable to being seen in terms of the same negative stereotypes as recipients of current welfare policies, although this may be mitigated to some extent given the universal and novel nature of UBI. Thus, with this design, we examined whether conservatives would view recipients of UBI more positively than recipients of current welfare policies and whether the freedom-based narrative of UBI would further accentuate this improvement.

Finally, we assessed two additional measures of support for UBI. First was a behavioral measure, the choice to voice opposition to ongoing pilots of UBI. Second was commitment to the unconditionality of UBI. Unconditionality is a core feature of a UBI policy distinguishing it from other welfare policies, which may be conditional, for instance, on the recipient actively seeking work or taking mandatory drug tests. Support for such conditionalities has been shown to reflect negative stereotypes of welfare recipients and distrust in their capabilities (Cooley et al., 2019; Schroeder et al., 2017; Soss et al., 2011). Given that the freedom message reduced negative stereotyping in Experiment 2, we assessed whether this message would also increase support among conservatives for implementing UBI without such conditionalities. However, as we will see, conservatives’ commitment to the unconditionality of UBI was exceptionally low and neither it nor the behavioral measure of support were increased by the freedom message.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

We recruited US adults from Cloud Research (formerly Turk Prime) (Litman, Robinson, & Abberbock, 2017) with the qualification of political views being “Conservative” or “Very Conservative,” anticipating based on the previous studies that approximately 15–20% of these participants would not self-report as conservative or pass the inclusion criteria. A total of 648 participants completed the survey. Using the same pre-registered exclusion criteria as in Experiment 2, we excluded

participants who did not respond “Yes” to whether we should use their data at the end of the survey ($N = 16$, by condition: $N = 5$ in control, $N = 11$ in freedom) and self-reported non-conservatives ($N = 73$, by condition: $N = 35$ in control, $N = 38$ in freedom).⁶ The final sample included 559 consenting conservatives. A sensitivity power analysis finds that this sample yields a minimum detectable effect size of $d = 0.24$ between conditions, based on 80% power and alpha level of 0.05.

The final sample averaged 41.9 years of age; 49.4% identified as female and 50.6% male; 85.5% identified as White, 3.6% Black, 4.7% Hispanic, 4.1% Asian, and 2.1% another category; 39.0% had a Bachelor’s degree or more education, 28.6% some college, and 32.2% a high school degree or less; the modal annual household income was \$50,000–\$75,000; 77.3% identified as Republican, 16.5% Independent, 3.6% Democrat, and 2.7% Other (See SM Table S3.1 for full reporting). As in Experiment 2, the sample was moderately conservative in political ideology ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 0.76$ on a 1–7 scale). Supporting the success of random assignment, we find no differences across conditions on these sociodemographic characteristics (see SM Table S3.1).

4.1.2. Procedure and Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two policy messages: policy details (control) or the same details with the Financial Freedom message, identical to these conditions in Experiment 2.

4.1.3. Measures

4.1.3.1. Policy attitudes and beliefs. Policy support was measured with the same single-item support measure from Experiments 1 and 2.

As a behavioral measure of support, after participants completed all other questions in the survey, we described ongoing pilot tests being conducted or planned in many states and asked participants if they wanted to “voice your support for or opposition to current basic income policy initiatives across the country.” Given that our previous experiments found that the freedom message lessened opposition (as opposed to boosting support), we coded this as *voiced opposition* (1 = oppose, 0 = oppose or no response). We also examined effects on taking any type of action (1 = support, 2 = neither, 3 = oppose).

We also assessed participants’ *commitment to the unconditionality of UBI* by asking participants how much they would want to amend the policy to make it more conditional and restrictive (5 items, e.g., “This assistance should be monitored so it is revoked from anyone who uses it on alcohol, tobacco, or drugs”; 7-point Likert scale from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*, $\alpha = 0.87$).

4.1.3.2. Prejudicial attitudes and beliefs. We assessed attitudes both towards UBI recipients and towards current welfare recipients. After being asked to describe the typical person receiving basic income in an open-ended manner, participants rated this person on the three items of *stereotypical views* from Experiment 2 as well as one additional item measuring their perceived morality (“How [lazy/hardworking, responsible/irresponsible, competent/incompetent, immoral/moral] is this person?”, 6-point scale, $\alpha = 0.96$). Participants also reported their feelings of affiliation with the typical recipient on a 3-item *affiliation* measure ($\alpha = 0.79$), which was identical to that in Experiment 2 but with one redundant IOS item dropped that asked about ‘all recipients’ rather than ‘this person’.

As a basis of comparison, we assessed the same measures with regard to current welfare recipients. After being asked to describe the typical person receiving welfare today, participants were asked to rate the typical welfare recipient on the same four items measuring *stereotypical views* and the same three items measuring *feelings of affiliation*.

4.1.3.3. Process variable. *Moral fit* was measured with the 3-item scale used in Experiments 1 and 2.

4.1.3.4. Supplementary analyses. To better understand the operation of the freedom message, we assessed whether, compared to the control message, the freedom message elevated positive aspirational features, specifically moral benefits of the policy, and/or allayed negative concerns. See SM Section 3.2 for details.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Analytic strategy

We ran linear regression for continuous outcomes and logistic regression for binary outcomes to assess condition effects. As in Experiment 2, all analyses were pre-registered unless marked as exploratory or supplementary, and we compute multiple-hypothesis corrected p -values across the pre-registered outcomes presented in the main text. To compare condition effects on attitudes towards UBI recipients versus a baseline of attitudes towards existing welfare recipients, we employ a mixed 2 (between-subjects: freedom message, control) \times 2 (within-subjects: UBI recipients, welfare recipients) design.

4.2.2. Policy attitudes and beliefs

Replicating Experiments 1 and 2, the freedom condition increased support for UBI among conservatives ($M_{\text{Control}} = 3.05$, $M_{\text{Freedom}} = 3.90$), $t(557) = 4.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.42$.

Although we hypothesized that the freedom message would also strengthen conservatives’ *commitment to the unconditionality* of UBI, we found similarly low levels of such commitment across conditions ($M_{\text{Control}} = 2.43$, $M_{\text{Freedom}} = 2.45$), $t(557) = 0.19$, $p = .853$, $d = 0.02$. In other words, conservatives showed relatively strong preferences to add conditions to the UBI policy across all conditions.

A logistic regression revealed no difference across conditions in the likelihood that participants *voiced opposition* to current “pilot tests of a basic income policy” across the US ($M_{\text{Control}} = 33.9\%$, $M_{\text{Freedom}} = 30.7\%$), $z(557) = -0.81$, $p = .514$, $d = -0.07$. An exploratory test also found no differences across conditions on whether participants selected to voice opposition, voice support, or neither ($\chi^2(2, N = 559) = 0.84$, $p = .656$).

4.2.3. Prejudicial attitudes towards UBI recipients and towards welfare recipients

Fig. 6 illustrates three findings. First, in focusing on the red icons in the figure, we replicated the finding from Experiment 2 that, compared to the control UBI message ($M = 3.58$), the freedom condition reduced negative stereotypical views of the typical UBI recipient, with participants rating them as less lazy, irresponsible, incompetent, and immoral in the freedom condition ($M = 3.18$), $t(557) = -3.19$, $p = .003$, $d = -0.27$. Second, in focusing on the grey icons, stereotypical views of the typical welfare recipient, which were our benchmark for welfare-related stereotypes, did not differ across the freedom and control conditions ($M_{\text{Control}} = 4.09$, $M_{\text{Freedom}} = 4.04$), $t(557) = -0.41$, $p = .725$, $d = -0.04$.

Third, in focusing on the dashed lines between the grey and red icons which illustrate within-participant difference scores, across both message conditions conservatives rated the typical UBI recipient less negatively than they rated the typical welfare recipient. However, while the average difference score between ratings of the typical welfare recipient and the typical UBI recipient was significant in the control UBI condition ($M_{\text{DiffScore, Control}} = -0.50$), $t(557) = -5.76$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.49$, it was larger yet in the freedom UBI condition ($M_{\text{DiffScore, Freedom}} = -0.86$), $t(557) = -9.29$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.79$. This difference-in-difference score, the between-condition differences in the within-person difference scores, was significant, $t(557) = -2.79$, $p = .008$, $d = -0.24$, driven by more positive views of UBI recipients than welfare recipients in the freedom condition compared to the control condition. As a robustness check, an exploratory mixed linear model with a random intercept for participant

⁶ We address the issue of attrition in SM Section 3.1.

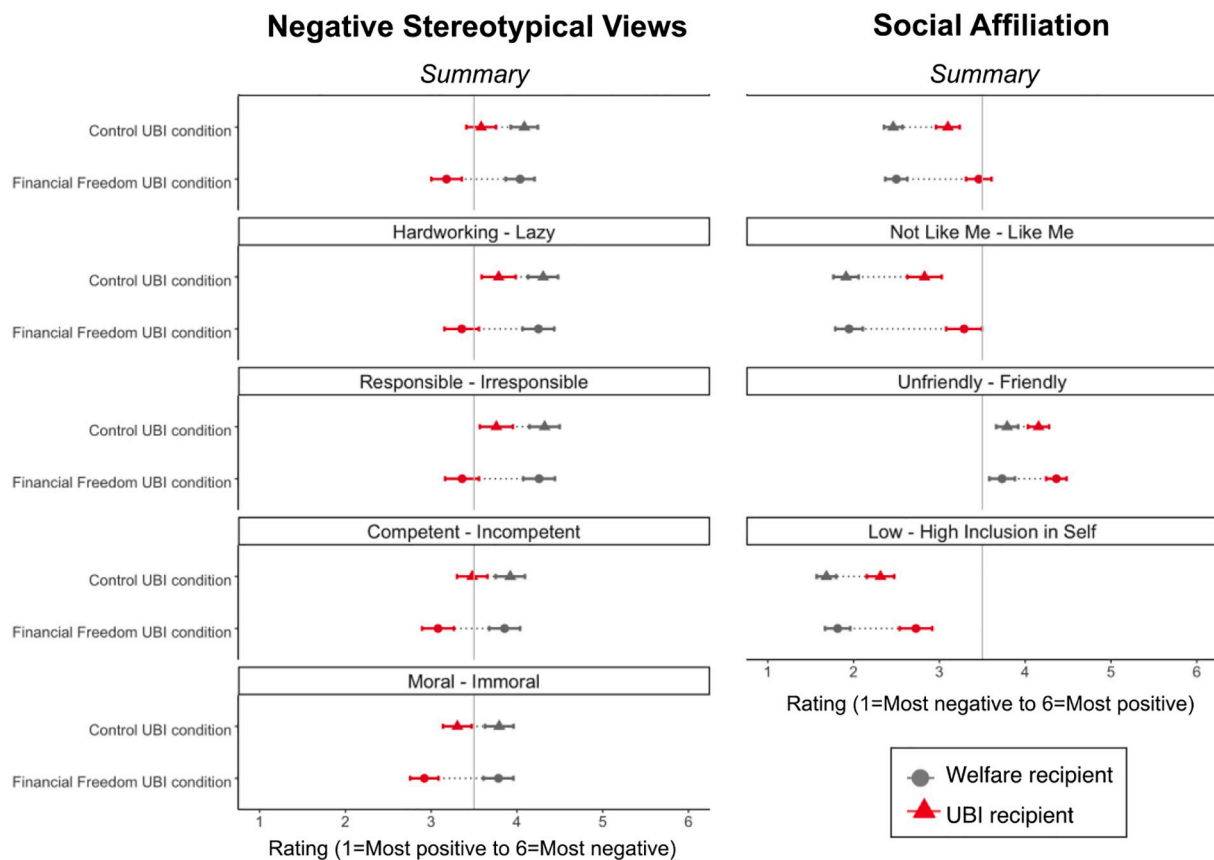


Fig. 6. Conservatives' prejudicial attitudes towards the typical UBI policy recipient in comparison to the typical welfare recipient, by UBI message condition (Experiment 3).

Note: The 'Summary' variables are the averages across the items. Between-participant differences, that is, the effect of UBI message condition on attitudes towards UBI recipients and towards welfare recipients can be read vertically, within facet. Within-participant differences between attitudes towards welfare and UBI recipients can be read horizontally, as indicated by the dotted lines. Error bars are 95% CI for the between-participant comparisons.

found a significant interaction between message condition and recipient type (interaction $\beta = -0.35$, 95% CI = $[-0.60, -0.11]$, $t(557) = -2.79$, $p = .005$). In other words, participants showed reduced negative stereotyping of UBI recipients compared to welfare recipients but these reductions rose by a factor of 1.75 with the values-aligned freedom message.

In terms of absolute levels, exploratory analyses show that, while the rating of stereotypical characteristics of the typical welfare recipient was negative on average across conditions ($M = 4.06$, two-sided t -test from the midpoint of 3.5: $t(558) = 9.58$, $p < .001$), and the rating of the typical UBI recipient in the control condition was neutral on average ($M = 3.58$, two-sided t -test from the midpoint of 3.5: $t(294) = 0.93$, $p = .352$), only for the typical UBI recipient in the freedom condition was the rating positive on average ($M = 3.18$, two-sided t -test from the midpoint of 3.5: $t(263) = -3.55$, $p < .001$). These results reveal that negative stereotyping of recipients was eliminated only in the freedom condition.

A similar pattern was observed for feelings of affiliation. In the between-subjects comparison, the freedom message increased affiliation with UBI recipients relative to the control UBI message ($M_{Control} = 3.10$, $M_{Freedom} = 3.46$, $t(557) = 3.48$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.30$), while there was no such effect for affiliation with the typical welfare recipient ($M_{Control} = 2.46$, $M_{Freedom} = 2.50$, $t(557) = 0.43$, $p = .725$, $d = 0.04$). In the mixed between- and within-subjects comparison, the average within-participant difference score between affiliation with the typical welfare recipient and UBI recipient was significant in the control UBI condition ($M_{DiffScore, Control} = 0.64$, $t(557) = 9.01$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.76$), but larger yet in the freedom UBI condition ($M_{DiffScore, Freedom} = 0.96$, $t(557) = 12.85$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.09$; difference-in-difference: $t(557) = 3.15$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.27$).

4.2.4. Process variables

Experiment 3 replicated the effects from Experiments 1 and 2 showing that the freedom message increased perceived *moral fit* with the policy ($M_{Control} = 2.25$, $M_{Freedom} = 2.78$), $t(557) = 5.25$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.44$. The patterns of mediation found in Experiments 1 and 2 also replicated (see SM Section 3.3).

4.2.5. Supplementary analyses

We found that, compared to the control condition, the freedom message both elevated the perceived positive *moral benefits* of a UBI policy and directionally, though not significantly, reduced the activation of *negative concerns* (see SM Section 3.2 for full results).

4.3. Discussion

Experiment 3 replicated the primary findings of Experiments 1 and 2. Representing UBI as advancing freedom both increased support for UBI and reduced prejudice against recipients. Further, directly comparing views of UBI and welfare recipients, we found that even as UBI recipients were viewed more positively than welfare recipients, this improvement nearly doubled with the freedom message. These results, first, support the beliefs of advocates and policymakers who maintain that UBI will be less vulnerable than welfare to prejudicial views of recipients. However, they also show that this potential is not fully realized absent moral reframing. Representing UBI in terms of advancing the value of freedom improved views of recipients by almost as much as the change in the policy (i.e., from welfare to UBI). Despite the effects of the freedom UBI narrative on mitigating welfare-related prejudice, two results showed

limitations of the freedom message: null effects on conservatives' commitment to the policy's unconditionality and on a behavioral measure of support, compared to the control UBI narrative.

5. Internal meta-analysis

5.1. Methods and analytic strategy

We conducted an internal meta-analysis to quantify the effects of the freedom message among conservatives on policy support and moral fit (Experiments 1–3) and on stereotypical views of UBI recipients (Experiments 2–3). We use the Cohen's d values as reported herein and compute the meta-analytic effect with the package 'rmeta' in R (Lumley, 2018).

5.2. Results

Among conservatives, the freedom message of UBI achieved a meta-analytic effect of increased policy support for UBI of $d = 0.36$ [95% CI: 0.27 to 0.46] over the control message. The meta-analytic effect on perceived moral fit was similar in size ($d = 0.35$ [95% CI: 0.26 to 0.44]), and that on negative stereotypical views of UBI recipients was slightly smaller ($d = -0.27$ [95% CI: -0.38 to -0.16]). See Fig. 7.

6. General discussion

Three experiments revealed that a values-based narrative of UBI, one grounded in the conservative value of economic freedom, can advance bipartisanship in support for UBI and simultaneously mitigate welfare-related prejudice among U.S. conservatives. While policy reforms often focus on changes to objective policy features, these studies suggest that the narratives attached to such features will meaningfully influence public attitudes towards both the policy and its recipients. In other words, the potential of policies like UBI to advance goals such as inequality reduction and prejudice mitigation may be limited if they fail to attend to the narratives that accompany them.

Here, we demonstrate the potential for policy narratives that elevate the moral foundations of those most opposed to the policy, U.S. conservatives in this case. Why might this narrative approach succeed? At a higher-order level, our findings suggests that inclusion begets inclusion: when conservatives felt that the policy recognized and reflected their own values, they were more likely to support the policy and express inclusive attitudes toward its recipients.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

First, previous work on moral reframing has featured moral foundations such as loyalty and fairness to enhance bipartisan support for social reforms. The present findings demonstrate that an additional moral foundation—that of freedom, or liberty (Iyer et al., 2012)—can do so as well. We found that representing a UBI policy in terms of its ability to advance economic freedom increased support from conservatives, and thus bipartisanship. A freedom-based narrative may be particularly suitable for UBI given historical bipartisan advocacy for similar policies on the basis of expanded freedoms, yet this narrative may also be a promising approach to representing a range of social policies to conservatives. Future studies may assess this potential with diverse policies and seek to identify where boundary conditions may lie (e.g., how much a policy's objective features may authentically reflect a given moral foundation).

Second, these findings point to a new direction in prejudice reduction research—that of leveraging moral reframing in institutional communications. Prejudice operates at the level of individual beliefs and behaviors, yet it can be reinforced by institutions, including by the policy narratives that institutions promulgate. Indeed, narratives about welfare have been historically created and cultivated in ways that produce stigma and prejudice toward its recipients (e.g., “the welfare queen” trope). Fittingly, we find that a solution to combatting welfare-related prejudice may lie at the same level—of the narratives attached to a government assistance policy. Crucially, we demonstrate that moral reframing may be particularly effective because it takes a more indirect approach to prejudice reduction, one that focuses primarily on the aspirational values advanced by the policy.

By what mechanisms might such values-aligned communications mitigate prejudice? Multiple processes may have driven this effect of the freedom-based message. Statistical mediation analyses found that greater perceptions of moral fit predicted greater affiliation with and more positive views of policy recipients. Perhaps moral fit fostered a shared identity, as reflected in respondents seeing recipients as being more “like me,” which may have arisen, for instance, from an implication of a broadly shared value of freedom. As a consequence, respondents may have extended positive self-representations to recipients, including seeing recipients as more competent and responsible (Schroeder et al., 2017). It is also possible that greater perceived moral fit could have reduced an identity threat associated with partisan divides and increased openness to new perspectives on a policy and its recipients. Future research may use manipulate-the-mediator designs

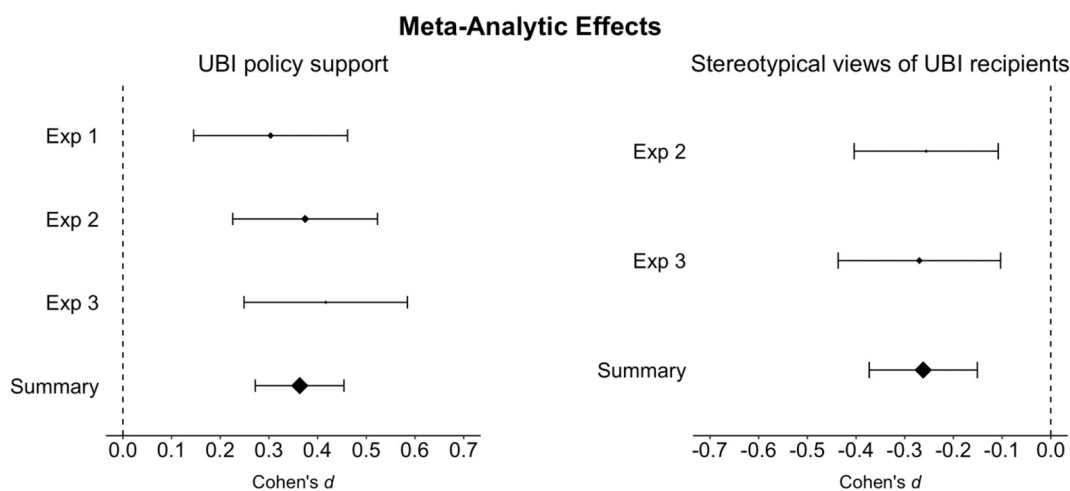


Fig. 7. Meta-analytic effects of the Financial Freedom message on conservatives' support of a UBI policy and stereotypical views of UBI recipients.

Note: The diamond size is proportional to the sample size. Error bars are 95% CI. For Experiment 1, the effect size is the simple slopes effect at the value of 'moderately conservative' on political ideology, 6 on the 7-point scale. The samples in Experiments 2 and 3 were similarly conservative (Experiment 2: $M = 5.88$, $SD = 0.82$; Experiment 3: $M = 5.94$, $SD = 0.76$).

(Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005) to causally identify such identity-related and cognitive processes of moral fit that may drive reductions in prejudicial attitudes. For instance, these might include manipulations of self-affirmation to reduce identity threats (Cohen et al., 2007; Fein & Spencer, 1997) or fostering a common superordinate identity among readers and policy recipients (Esses et al., 2001).

6.2. Future directions

The present experiments demonstrated robust impacts of a freedom-based narrative of UBI on immediate outcomes, replicated across multiple studies and measures. The results suggest that the value of freedom is a promising narrative foundation for UBI policies and for broader applications in the moral reframing literature.

However, would these effects survive in the present highly partisan and racially divided US political environment? On the one hand, Experiments 1 and 2 found that the freedom message not only increased support for UBI among conservatives but also strengthened their resistance against common counterarguments to UBI that would likely arise in the real world. Yet on the other hand, Experiment 2 found that negative welfare-related stereotypes may be easy to re-activate, even unintentionally, with references to the personal qualities of policy recipients, even positive and counterstereotypical qualities. Moreover, Experiment 3 found that the freedom message did not affect conservatives' preferences for adding conditionalities to the policy. In the real world and outside of the experimental context, those opposed to UBI might conjure up stereotypes related to recipients' laziness and irresponsibility, including explicitly anti-Black stereotypes, to advocate against UBI or for policy conditionalities (e.g., work requirements, drug use monitoring) (Cooley et al., 2019; Wetts & Willer, 2019). Such conditionalities would effectively render UBI more like the current welfare programs that conservatives oppose. An open question is how vulnerable conservatives' support for UBI is to these processes and what might be done to mitigate them. Can variations on freedom-based messages allay concerns about recipients' misuse of benefits, concerns which are largely unfounded (Evans & Popova, 2017)? For instance, might tying the narrative of freedom explicitly to freedom from conditionalities resonate with conservatives and mitigate this preference for them?

Finally, intersectional analyses across race/ethnicity, social class, and political ideology will be particularly informative in understanding the effects of freedom-based narratives across the US. Here, we found that narratives of freedom highlighting individual autonomy and freedom from others' influence was most effective for predominantly White conservatives from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. However, results may differ among subgroups of conservatives from working-class contexts and minoritized groups. For instance, given that working class Americans and some minoritized groups tend to highly value interdependence as well as independence (Markus, 2017), future research with these groups may examine the effectiveness of the financial freedom narrative that reflects individual autonomy and compare it to one grounded in group self-determination or collective freedom.

6.3. Conclusion

Attempts to reform government assistance programs of the recent past have aspired but largely failed to establish evidence-based and bipartisan solutions to mitigating poverty and inequality. Perhaps crucially, they have been unable to bridge the moral divides across political groups or to combat the prejudicial beliefs often directed towards recipients of welfare. Here we demonstrate the role of policy narratives, when values-aligned, to better promote policy goals of mitigating both partisanship and prejudice.

Open practices

All de-identified data and study materials are made publicly

available via the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/kn6s4>. Time-stamped pre-registrations for Experiments 2 and 3 and documentation of deviations may also be found there.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

Data availability

Data and study materials are shared on the project OSF page: <https://osf.io/kn6s4/>.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104424>.

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