Costly Values: Values-Based Justifications Exacerbate the Consequences of Policy Disagreements for Politician Support*

Erik Peterson and Gabor Simonovits
Dept. of Political Science
Stanford University
erik.peterson@stanford.edu; gabor@stanford.edu

Oct 12, 2014 Draft

*Data collected by Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences, NSF Grant 0818839, Jeremy Freese and James Druckman, Principal Investigators. The authors thank Justin Grimmer, Neil Malhotra, Mike Tomz, Rob Willer and attendees of the Stanford Political Psychology Workshop for helpful comments. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the NYU Experiments Conference and the Midwest Political Science Association's Annual Meeting. Upon publication the dataset will be made available on the authors website and until then available upon request.

Abstract

Politicians regularly communicate their policy positions to the public. These statements are rarely a simple description of the politician's stance on an issue. Rather, legislators typically offer both a positional cue informing the public of what position they take and a policy justification stating why they take that position. In this study we use two survey experiments to explore the extent to which evidence and values-based justifications alter the dynamics of spatial voting on an issue of importance in contemporary American politics, the debate over the appropriate income tax rates for wealthy individuals. We find that, relative to policy justifications that rely on evidence, values-based justifications backfire and decrease a candidate's support among voters who oppose their policy stance. We also show that, on the issue of taxes, employing either type of justification does not increase a candidate's support relatively to simply stating their position on the issue.

In models of spatial voting citizens enforce democratic accountability by responding to the policy positions taken by political candidates (Downs 1957). Voters constrain the actions of politicians by supporting candidates that take issue positions that align with their preferences and opposing candidates with issue stances that deviate from their preferred policies. While the simplest of these models offer little room for politicians to deviate from the logic of spatial voting, a long line of research that examines the relationship between legislators and constituents identifies a major complication to this process. When candidates and legislators stake out an issue position, they are also afforded the opportunity to explain their actions (Kingdon 1973, Mayhew 1974, Fenno 1978). To what extent can politicians use the opportunity to justify their policy positions to increase their public support?

In this study we use two survey experiments to examine the extent to which policy justifications based on either evidence or values alter the well studied dynamics of spatial policy voting on an issue of utmost relevance in contemporary American politics: the debate over the appropriate income tax rates for wealthy individuals. In contrast to previous research (McGraw et al. 1993, Grose et al. nd), we find a potential downside to some policy justifications. After developing a theory about the potential for differing consequences of justifications on different types of individuals, we show that, relative to a scenario in which they support their issue position with evidence, justifications citing the normative correctness of a position can backfire and decrease their popularity among members of the public who oppose their policy position.

We also find that, on the issue of tax policy, employing a justification does not increase a

candidate's support among the public relative to simply stating their position on the issue. We report suggestive evidence for one mechanism behind this finding. While justifications do not appear to convince those who disagree with the politician to alter their own stance on the issue, they do serve to accentuate and clarify any policy disagreements that exist between a politician and their constituents.

Position Taking and Justifications

While legislator position taking plays a central role in both spatial voting models (e.g., Downs 1957) and in studies of legislators (e.g., Mayhew 1974), these two lines of research depict legislator position taking in distinct manners. Spatial models seek to explain what happens after a legislator has taken a position and this position is communicated to their constituents. Studies find strong support for proximity voting. Voters are more likely to support politicians who take a position closer to their own on an issue (Tomz and Van Houweling 2008, Jessee 2012).

In contrast to the spatial voting account, many Congressional scholars focus on the steps that precede the starting point of spatial models, namely the manner in which a legislator takes a position in the first place. These researchers find that position taking involves legislators not only describing their stance on an issue, but also providing justifications for that stance (Kingdon 1973, Mayhew 1974, Fenno 1978). These justifications contain features such as compensatory rhetoric that provides constituents with a broader view of the legislator's actions on similar issues (Grose et al. nd), "crafted talk" that aims to change constituent opinion on the policy under consideration (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000), or an

explanation for holding a position that portrays the legislator as principled or reasonable, even to a hostile audience that continues to disagree with their stance (Mayhew 1974, Fenno 1978).

Some previous work examines the consequences of legislator justifications.[1] In one line of research McGraw and coauthors (see e.g., McGraw 1991, McGraw et al. 1993) examine the consequences of the "account" a politician offers for their vote on their approval among the public. These studies are primarily concerned with the manner in which a legislator can use rhetoric to avoid the blame for negative outcomes and actions. This line of research finds that rhetoric proves helpful in this regard, however it leaves open the question of how this process occurs on positional issues where a legislator has no intention of abandoning their stance and where this stance will be considered positive by some constituents and negative by others.

In an innovative study, Grose et al. (nd) examine consequences of the explanations that legislators offer for their policy decisions on public opinion. In a field experiment, they solicit response letters from Senators. These letters originate from constituents that either agree or disagree with the position the Senator has taken on an immigration policy issue. In examining the responses they receive the authors find that legislators emphasize additional, similar position taking on the issue to constituents that agree with their position and highlight different, cross-cutting votes to constituents who disagree with their vote on the issue. In a survey experiment, they then show that these explanations alter public support

[1] In what follows we refer to a policy argument as a "justification" if it is employed by a politician in order to increase their support among the public. The target attitude in these cases is support for a legislator rather than some measure of support for a particular policy or issue. We make this distinction to clarify the difference between the goals of this study and previous examinations of issue frames/policy arguments.

and have important consequences for how constituents perceive a legislator's stance on an issue.

While Grose et al. (nd) identify one important part of legislator communications to different constituents, emphasizing information outside the scope of a particular issue, this still leaves open the question of how this process will proceed on a highly salient issue where legislators must confine their justification to the issue at hand or in situations where the precise targeting of messages is not feasible. In the next section we draw on political communication research to establish the avenues of response open to legislators to justify their vote choice on a salient issue, income taxation on the wealthy.

Justification as Framing

Political communication scholars have studied several types of policy arguments employed in areas where both technical and symbolic considerations are applicable in a policy debate. One line of research focuses on evidence-based policy arguments that make falsifiable predictions about the consequences of a policy, usually with reference to empirical evidence of some sort (Lau, Smith and Fiske 1991, Jerit 2009). Jerit (2009) finds that evidence-based arguments change beliefs about the consequences of a particular policy among survey respondents and, accordingly, their support for that policy.

A second broad class consists of values-based arguments. These arguments support a particular policy through non-falsifiable statements about the normative desirability (e.g., fairness) of a policy. Several studies demonstrate that, like evidence-based arguments, values-based frames can influence policy support among individuals (e.g., Nelson, Clawson and

Oxley 1997, Brewer 2001, Nelson and Garst 2005). For example, Brewer (2001) find that values-based issue frames affect public support for welfare policy.

While some research only examines one of these argument types at a time, more recent studies compare these argument types. Druckman and Bolsen (2011) study the consequences of evidence and values-based arguments over new energy technologies and find that they are equally effective in shifting public support. Martietta (2012) examines a similar comparison of arguments in the context of issues such as gun control and also finds neither argument type is innately more effective than the other at influencing public opinion, although they do have different consequences for voter evaluations of the traits of the speaker providing the argument (Marietta 2009) and the strength of the attitudes that individuals form in response to these arguments (Marietta 2008). Thus it remains unclear why politicians cite evidence when they try to justify their policy stances in some cases, but invoke values in other occasions.

In what follows we focus on the use of justifications in the debate over the appropriate tax rate for wealthy individuals. We have three reasons for this focus. First, the issue is simultaneously highly salient and "easy" in the sense that it has recently been at the center of political debate and contains symbolic features (Carmines and Stimson 1980). This makes the policy area a tough test for observing any potential justification effects since voters will hold more crystallized preferences on this issue. Second, this policy highlights one area of disconnect between constituents and representatives. When polled on this issue over 60% of the public routinely supports increasing taxes on wealthy individuals (see e.g., Pew 2012). Yet, this policy has yet to gain traction in Congress. This makes it important to understand

if policy justifications might have some role in allowing elected officials to oppose this policy despite constituent preferences. Finally, as we detail below, tax policy represents an area where both evidence and values-based justifications are frequently offered by politicians. This ensures the treatments we use have a face validity that would not be present on issues where only one type of policy argument is routinely employed or applicable (but see Feinberg and Willer 2013 on the impact of unfamiliar frames).

Previous analysis of political rhetoric has found both types of arguments in tax policy debates. Gale and Slemrod (2001) identify both evidence-based and values-based claims present in policy discussions of estate taxation. Gordon and Miller (2004) report numerous examples of values-based statements about taxation during a presidential debate. More recently, the debate over the taxation of individuals earning over $250,000 per year during the 2012 presidential election contained both evidence and values-based justifications. For example, in a television appearance Treasury Secretary Geithner defended increasing taxes on the wealthy as an essential component of reducing the size of government deficits and improving economic growth (CNN, 2012). In contrast, Vice-President Biden invoked fairness at a campaign event to argue in support of the same policy (White House, 2012).

Expectations

Our focus departs from earlier work in political communication by focusing on values and evidence-based justifications for taking a political position. While this difference may appear subtle, our target attitude of interest, voter evaluations of a candidate, is different than the policy attitudes that have been the primary focus in earlier research examining these

argument types. Importantly, justifications can prove successful even if they do not persuade members of the public to change their positions on an issue. It is possible that justifications can improve an audience's views of a particular representative even without persuading them to change their own issue position.

There are two previous literatures that generate expectations about how the type of justification that a legislator employs could interact with an audience's stance on an issue to affect their public support. First, some research suggests cognitive reasons for these types of justifications to have different effects on public support for a legislator. Evidence and values-based justifications place different information processing requirements on citizens. Evaluating the evidence that a legislator provides to buttress their position is cognitively intensive and requires citizens to understand the nature of the prediction and its relevance to the current policy issue (see e.g., Druckman and Bolsen 2011). In contrast, values are much more readily available and interpretable to citizens. For example, Goren (2012) demonstrates that values underpin both sophisticated and unsophisticated citizens' issue preferences and candidate evaluations. They do so by allowing individuals to quickly interpret and understand complex political settings.[2] This leads to the expectation that, relative to evidence-based justifications, values-based justifications will place a respondent's own position on the issue in sharper contrast with the politician's stance, leading politicians to suffer among citizens who disagree with their stance on the issue and to gain additional support from citizens who agree with them.

[2]Recent work on this issue stresses the distinction between core political values and personal values (see e.g., Schwartz et al. 2010). While this distinction is important in many settings, both types of values focus on normatively desirable end states and are regarded as relatively easy for citizens to access in politics. These distinctions set them sufficiently apart from evaluations of evidence for our present purposes.

However, there is also the potential for values and evidence-based justifications to have different effects among supporters and opponents of a legislators position because of the affective consequences of encountering these types of arguments. Research on the psychology of self-affirmation (e.g., Steele 1988, Sherman and Cohen 2006) stresses the critical role that maintaining a positive self-view has on an individual's responses to a variety of situations. For example, Minson and Monin (2012) find that individuals react in a more negative fashion to groups they disagree with when these out-groups emphasize their moral superiority. Such a dynamic is possible in the current setting because values-based justification make normative assessments that might contradict a citizen's own view that they have taken the "right" stance on the issue by challenging their views of fairness or other values. Similarly, Brewer (2001) finds that values-based arguments prove ineffective in some cases due to angering those who do not agree with the value statements included in a frame (see also McGraw 1998, 132). Accordingly, evidence-based justifications appear to have a smaller downside than values-based arguments as they indicate that the representative has simply come to a different understanding of the potential consequences of a proposal and do not highlight any values-based differences between the representative and their constituent. However, evidence-based justifications will also fail to affirm the values of those who support a legislator's stance on an issue and so may increase support among this group to a smaller extent than values-based justifications.

These accounts are difficult to tease apart empirically given the many interactions between affect and cognition in spatial voting (e.g., Brady and Sniderman 1985). However, they do suggest the same interaction between justification type and audience predisposition.

For our present purposes, adjudicating between cognitive and affective mechanisms is not particularly important since both of these accounts lead to an observationally equivalent result where values-based justifications prove more effective among those constituents who support the position that a legislator takes on tax policy while evidence-based justifications prove more effective among individuals who disagree with the stance the politician has taken on a particular issue. As such, we do not commit to a particular mechanism and leave an assessment of the particular nature of the mechanism behind any effects we find for future work.

This previous work leads to the following two expectations:

H1: Holding the quality of justifications fixed, evidence-based justifications should generate increased support among individuals who *disagree* with a politician's stance on an issue relative to values-based justifications.

H2: Values-based justifications should generate increased support among individuals who *agree* with a politician's stance on an issue to relative to evidence-based justifications.

Research Design

We examine the effects of policy justifications in the domain of tax policy using two survey experiments. The first experiment, referred to as Study 1 in what follows, was implemented on a nationally representative sample of respondents from GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks) through Time Sharing Experiments in the Social Sciences' Short Studies Program.[3]

[3]See Rivers (2006) on sampling issues in opt-in internet panels

We then conducted a follow-up, Study 2, featuring additional experimental conditions and questions with respondents recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk[4].

Study 1 used a 2×2 factorial design. Respondents read one of four candidate justifications for taking a particular position on the issue of tax policy for wealthy individuals. Half of the participants read about a candidate supporting a tax increase on wealthy individuals, and the other half read about a candidate opposing it. Each candidate offered either an evidence-based or a values-based justification for their position with the two arms of the experiment being independent of one another (we will refer to these conditions as Pro-Evidence, Pro-Values, Con-Evidence and Con-Values).

Each justification followed a similar format. First, the politician highlighted the particular dimension they would use to justify their policy stance. Next, they established their position and justification for their stance. They then offered either evidence for the evidence-based justifications or an elaboration of the way in which values were applicable to the issue for the values-based justifications. Finally, the politician summarized his position by stating the policy was either the "right" ("wrong") thing to do for values-based justifications or the "efficient" ("inefficient") thing to do for evidence-based justifications[5]. Like some other work that examines voter responsiveness to candidate position taking (e.g., Gerber et al. 2011) we randomized the name of the politician and the politician's political party across conditions. After reading this justification respondents were asked to evaluate the candidate on a 100-point support scale and respondents were asked to indicate their own attitudes about the policy either before or after they have read about the candidate (the order of the

[4] See Berinsky et al. (2012) for the advantages and disadvantages of using Mturk for political science experiments.

[5] The full text of these justifications is included in Appendix A.

two questions were randomized)[6].

Study 1 allows an initial examination of our theory on a nationally representative sample of respondents. However, length requirements prevented the inclusion of some follow-up questions to examine particular mechanisms through which justifications might operate.[7] Additionally, previous work in political communication (e.g., examinations of the effects of partisan cues on policy support, Nicholson 2012) establishes that it is important to not only compare two different types of communications to each other, but to also compare these messages to a neutral condition in which no message is provided. To address these issues we conducted a follow-up study on Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

Study 2 contained six conditions. In each condition, respondents first offered their own opinion on the tax policy issue under consideration and then read about a member of Congress who took a position either in favor or in opposition to tax increases on the wealthy. The candidate then provided an evidence-based justification, a values-based justification or did not offer a justification for their position. This no justification condition is one key change from Study 1 to Study 2. After reading the justifications, respondents evaluated their likelihood of voting for the candidate in the next election on a 100 point scale. Finally, because of the greater flexibility to include additional material in this second survey, respondents answered a battery of post-treatment questions.[8]

[6] The supporting information contains question wordings

[7] The Short Studies program allows for only two survey items per respondent

[8] The additional space for items on this survey permitted the inclusion of a manipulation check to ensure that respondents perceived the evidence-based justifications as relying more on evidence to a greater extent than the values-based explanation. The results show that this was the case: on a scale recoded from 0 (definitely not based on evidence) to 1 (definitely based on evidence) justifications intended to rely on evidence got an average rating of 0.54 while values-based explanations got an average of 0.32. This difference is statistically significant ($p< 0.01$).

To test the general effectiveness of justifications at changing voter opinion in this second study, respondents were asked to to provide their own policy opinion both before and after they read the policy justification. Using this within-subject design, we examine if the justifications themselves changed a respondent's tax opinion. We also asked questions to assess the potential mechanisms through which justifications might affect support. In particular, respondents placed the candidate's tax position on an issue scale, indicated how certain they were about the candidate's position, and reported whether the candidate's statement triggered a negative emotional response (i.e., "Did anything the candidate say make you angry?").

As a final point, we note that both the hypotheses and design of this experiment are focused on general responses to politician messaging based on the issue alignment between voters and politicians. As we have no clear hypotheses about why one group (e.g., Republicans or Democrats) differs in their responses to justifications, we focus on the overall effects of justifications, rather than subgroup effects, in the subsequent analysis. Our experimental design incorporates this notion by randomizing the party of the politician that individuals were asked to evaluate, ensuring that co-partisanship is balanced across the conditions in the experiment.

Effectiveness of Justifications

Our hypotheses lead us to expect that the relative effectiveness of the evidence-based and values-based policy justifications will vary based on the alignment between the issue position advocated by the candidate and an individual's own issue position. Accordingly, Figure 1A

presents the effect of the values-based justification (compared to evidence-based justifications) on candidate support. The results are subset by a respondent's issue alignment with the candidate they evaluated. To measure the respondent's tax policy position, we use the seven-point tax policy support item all respondents answered. In what follows, we refer to a respondent as incongruent with a candidate if the two take opposing tax policy positions (e.g., the candidate supported increasing taxes on the wealthy and the respondent opposed this). To ease interpretation, we code respondents who did not express an opinion as congruent.[9]

- Figure 1 here

Differential Justification Effects On Evaluations

The empty circles in Figure 1 display the effect of values-based justifications (relative to support in the evidence-based justification condition) among congruent respondents. The solid circles display the same effect among incongruent respondents. We report three sets of estimates: one based on the nationally representative sample (which is weighted to estimate population average treatment effects), a second using the Mturk survey and a third based on a pooling respondents from both studies.[10] In all three settings we find that values-based justification generate greater candidate support among respondents who are congruent with the candidate they evaluate while evidence-based justifications perform better among

[9]Since almost 90% of respondents expressed some opinion, this coding decision is immaterial for our findings. We obtain similar results when coding indifferent individuals as incongruent or dropping them from the analyses.

[10]To make the results comparable across surveys, we drop the "control condition (i.e. the one without any justification) from Study 2 and include study a fixed effect in the regression on the pooled sample.

incongruent respondents.

The appropriate statistical test to assess the statistical significance of these findings is a difference-in-differences comparing the treatment effect of values-based justifications for congruent individuals to the same effect among incongruent individuals. We implement this test using a regression where candidate support is regressed on an indicator variable for justification type (values-based vs. evidence-based), an indicator variable for incongruence of position between the candidate and the respondent and the interaction of the two variables. The empirical counterpart of our hypotheses is that that the interaction of incongruence and values-based justification is negative, indicating that arguments invoking values rather than evidence are less successful among individuals who disagree with the position of the politician than they are among individuals who agree with the politician's stance. The first two columns of Table 1 separately reports results for the two studies. We find that the interaction effect is negative in both samples. The parameter estimates are -0.049 in Study 1 and -0.058 in Study 2 and are statistically significant at the 90% level in both samples (p=0.088 and p=0.085 respectively). The third column of Table 1 reports the same specification when pooling together the two samples in order to increase our statistical power. Again, the interaction the effect is negative and is statistically significant at the 95% level (b=-0.038, p=0.043).

- Table 1 here

These results provide strong support for our hypothesis. We find that invoking values

instead of evidence in explaining policies is less successful for politicians among incongruent respondents than among congruent respondents. While the effect sizes are small in absolute terms, they indicate that well-targeted explanations can recover a fraction of the loss in support a politician incurs due to taking a policy stance that is incongruent with the preferences of some constituents.

Overall Effects of Justifications

The results presented above support our hypotheses about the relative effectiveness on different types of justifications among voters agreeing or disagreeing with politicians on a given issues, an additional research question is whether providing *any* justification is helpful in this setting. To examine this point our second study included two conditions where the politicians did not provide justifications for their positions and simply stated their issue position (we will refer to these no-justification conditions conditions as the control group).

Figure 1B presents the effect of both evidence and values-based justifications compared to no justifications in Study 2. Again, we present results separately for respondents reading about politicians with congruent and incongruent positions. We also present estimates for the full sample. The empty circles display the effect of evidence-based justifications whereas the solid dots display the effect of values-based justifications.

One pattern is immediately noticeable: the estimates in Figure 1b show that none of the justifications increased the support for the politicians. The top two estimates show that on average, justification invoking values reduced support for politicians and and explanations relying on evidence did not noticeably move support from the no justification condition. The

estimates estimating the effect of the two types of justifications separately for congruent and incongruent respondents reveal a pattern similar to the finding comparing the two justifications. Values-based justifications reduced support among incongruent individuals (compared to no justification) and slightly increased support among congruent individuals.

The parameter estimates in the last column of Table 1 show that among congruent respondents neither type of justification has a substantively or statistically significant effect (both effect sizes are around 0.01 in absolute value, and with respective p-values above 0.6). As before, the interaction of incongruent and values-based justifications (now compared to no justification) is negative and statistically significant at the 95% level (b=-0.076, p=0.023). Finally, the effect of evidence-based justifications is the same among congruent and incongruent respondents.

To recapitulate, these second set of findings show that values-based justifications perform worse than evidence-based justifications or no justification among incongruent individuals, but neither kind of justification increases support compared to a candidate simply stating there position on the issue. This finding suggests that while well-targeted explanations on this issue do not help politicians to garner support, mis-targeted justifications can hurt their popularity (see Hersh and Schaffner 2013 for a similar dynamic in the context of campaign appeals based on race). Next we consider the extent to which the different mechanisms we proposed account for these observed effects.

Mechanisms

Why do the two types of justifications perform differently? We posited two pathways, one cognitive and one affective, through which justifications might influence candidate support. We also identified one path, persuasion, through which previous work suggests the justifications examined here are unlikely to influence candidate support. First, we demonstrate that the effects we observe do not appear to be due to persuasion.

Limited Persuasion

For differences in justification persuasiveness to explain the results in the previous section, the evidence-based justifications must shift respondent opinion in the direction supported in the argument more than values-based justifications. Study 2 offers a fine-grained manner with which to assess persuasion. In this study respondents were asked their own position on tax policy both before and after they encountered the different justifications. This allows us to track opinion change at the individual level by examining whether respondent's altered their tax policy position after encountering the justification. Figure 2 presents the mean opinion changes within each justification category, where opinion change is measured by subtracting an individual's pre-opinion justification from their post-justification opinion (so that positive values indicate increased support for the policy). There are no significant differences in the effectiveness of justifications on the same side of an issue: when we regress opinon change on candidate position, justification types and the interaction of the two, we find no significant differences and the interaction effects are very close to zero (see Table S1 in the Online Appendix).

-Figure 2 Here

In sum, the results indicate that no justification type was systematically better at altering opinion than the other, making it unlikely that persuasion generated the observed effects of justification type on candidate support. It appears that our results were not a consequence of these justifications simply persuading individuals to move their issue positions into alignment with the candidate. Justifications must operate in some alternative manner.

Affective Mechanisms

The first potential mechanism we consider is the affective pathway to justification effectiveness that we posited in our expectations sections. To recap, some previous work on the psychology of self-affirmation suggests that respondents will have a negative affective reaction to out-groups that emphasize their moral superiority, offering one explanation for the evidence we find in support of H1. To examine this affective pathway we asked respondents in Study 2, after encountering the justification and providing their candidate evaluation, whether or not anything the candidate they read about made them "angry". The estimated effect of evidence and values-based justifications to this item within are displayed in Figure 3 for incongruent respondents as it is hypothesized that justifications might make individuals who are not in alignment with their representative on an issue more negative towards that representative. While these results align in the appropriate direction for the affective mech-

anism hypothesis (i.e., incongruent individuals receiving values-justifications report being more angry at the representative than those who received an evidence-based justification), but the differences are not statistically significant (b=0.061, p=0.19 for values-based justifications and b=0.01, p=0.85 for evidence-based justifications). This offers suggestive evidence that affect may explain some portion of the differences between evidence-based and values-based justifications that we observe.

- Figure 3 here

Cognitive Mechanisms

Our second potential mechanism is a cognitive pathway based on the extent to which values-based and evidence-based justifications place different information processing requirements on citizens. To explain our findings in support of H1, values-based justifications, relative to evidence-based justifications, might clarify the differences that exist between citizens and a candidate. To examine this pathway we asked respondents to place the candidate's position on a policy scale, similar to the one on which respondents provided their own opinion. We then asked them how certain they were in their evaluation of the position the candidate took on the issue.

Figure 3 displays the effect of justifications on the position extremity item, which asked respondents to place the representative on a policy scale. For this analysis position extremity is constructed by measuring the distance of each respondent's evaluation of the representative's position from the scale midpoint and then recoding it to lie between 0 and 1. Here

respondents in both the evidence and the values-based justification conditions are more likely to place the candidate they evaluated at an extreme point on the policy scale than those in the control conditions (b=0.096, $p<$ 0.01 for values-based justifications and b=0.076, $p<$ 0.01 for evidence-based justifications). It seems that value-based justifications are more likely to make an extreme impression on respondents than those based on evidence, but this difference is not statistically significant. Overall, these findings give little support that the cognitive mechanisms we hypothesized, but account for some of the detrimental effects of both evidence-based and values-based justifications compared to the no justification in Study 2.

Figure 3 also displays the estimated effect of evidence and values-based justifications on the position certainty item, which asked respondents how certain they were about their evaluation of the position that the representative took on taxation. Relative to those in the evidence-based justification conditions, respondents in the values-based justification conditions were more certain of their evaluations of the candidate's stance (b=0.046, p=0.01). Furthermore, both justification type appears to have made respondents more certain about the politician's stance, though this difference is hard to interpret since those in the control group also read less information than those in the other groups.

Discussion

Before examining the implications of our results, we discuss two potential concerns. First, to what extent do these results generalize to other issues areas? Second, how closely does this experiment approximate the real reactions voters have to candidate justifications?

Generalizability

As we mention earlier, there are two reasons to focus on taxation in our experiments. First, as voters are easily persuaded about issues they are unfamiliar with, using a highly salient issue was necessary to distinguish the effects of justifications from persuasion. This is not to say that our results would not generalize to less salient issues where justifications can also serve the purpose of persuading voters; it is just that with those issues it would be harder to estimate the effect of justifications, net of persuasion.

At the same time, taxation was an appropriate test case for our research design because both evidence and values-based justifications are employed in this debate. For many issues, the prevalence of justification types is more lopsided: debates over more technical issues are likely to employ more evidence-based arguments, whereas the discourse over issues such as abortion or gay marriage revolves around values. Thus, we conjecture that our results are probably less generalizable to these issues, simply because voters may attach different weights to evidence and values across different issues. Research analyzing how different issues differ in the way they are discussed by politicians would be important and helpful to better understand our basic results, but falls outside of the scope of this paper.

External Validity

As with all survey experiments, the control over research design comes with a loss of external validity. It is unclear how our results about fictitious candidates would change if we used real politicians familiar to subjects. Similarly, we have no way to tell how our dependent measure (the likelihood of re-electing a candidate) maps to actual voting behavior in a similar

context. Most importantly, our design is artificial in the sense that respondents are forced to read the experimentally assigned justification whereas in the real world voters are likely to self-select to listen to such communications.

While these concerns are troubling, we note that it would be extremely difficult to make any causal claims about this question using observational data. If candidates engaged in real-world politics in fact behave strategically, meaning that they make efforts to offer arguments that will help them in a particular circumstance, we might find that values-based and evidence-based arguments are equally effective. But this could entirely be a product of their strategic choice about when to employ different types of justifications.

With the recent surge in the use of field experiments (e.g., Butler and Broockman 2011, Grose et al., nd) it seems likely that in the future researchers could cooperate with candidates to test the relative effectiveness of different justifications in the framework of a randomized experiment. This would entail the randomization of justification for the same positions in real communication of politicians with voters along with the measurement of attitudes pre-treatment and measurement of some dependent variable post-treatment (see Broockman and Butler, 2014 for a similar approach). While unfortunately we did not have the means to take such an approach our results hopefully inspire research that uses more realistic stimuli.

Conclusion

Even on a highly salient issue, we show that different types of policy justifications affect political support for candidates over and beyond their spatial positions themselves. A counterintuitive finding is that while earlier studies portrayed policy justifications as a tool to

reduce the penalty a candidate paid for spatial incongruence with their constituents, we find that providing certain types of justifications can decrease a candidate's support, even relative to taking a position without a justification. Moreover, we find no strong benefits to a candidate in providing a justification in this setting. At best, justifications perform on par with the candidate taking a stance without providing an explanation for that stance. While some settings (e.g., interviews with reporters, questions during debates) require some kind of response, future studies should examine the extent to which legislator's employ this approach and fail to offer justifications on some issues in order to avoid the potential for the backfire effect we observe here.

For political communication researchers, these results show that despite previous findings of a roughly equivalent effectiveness between the two types of justifications in shaping policy attitudes, these argument types have distinct consequences for the actors that employ them, particularly for the support they receive from constituents (see also Marietta 2012). This also contributes to the recent turn in political communication research examining the potential for micro-targeting messages to some groups rather than others (Hersh and Schaffner 2013, Grose et al. nd).

Finally, our results suggest one reason why many different arguments are employed by elite actors on a given issue. We see that different argument types are more effective among different audiences, even if the arguments are all made in support of the same positions. This provides one potential explanation for why multiple types of arguments often exist in a single issue area rather than a single argument type dominating all discussion of an issue (see e.g., Chong and Druckman 2011). Our findings suggest it is important to understand

how candidates develop an understanding of which arguments to employ with which groups and examine the extent in which they do this in practice.

References

Berinsky, Adam J., Gregory A. Huber and Gabriel S. Lenz. 2012. "Evaluating Online Labor Markets for Experimental Research." *Political Analysis* 20(3): 351-368.

Brady, Henry E. and Paul M. Sniderman. 1985. "Attitude Attribution: A Group Basis for Political Reasoning." *American Political Science Review* 79(4): 1061-1078.

Brewer, Paul R. 2001. "Value Words and Lizard Brains: Do Citizens Deliberate About Appeals to Their Core Values?" *Political Psychology* 22(1): 45-64.

Broockman, David E., and Daniel M. Butler. 2014. "How Do Citizens React When Politicians Support Policies They Oppose? Field Experiments with Elite Communication." Working Paper.

Butler, Daniel M., and David E. Broockman. 2011. "Do politicians racially discriminate against constituents? A field experiment on state legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 55(3): 463-477.

Carmines, Edward G. and James A. Stimson. 1980. "The Two Faces of Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 74(1): 78-91.

Chong, Dennis and James N. Druckman. 2007. "Framing Public Opinion in Competitive Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 101(4): 637-656.

Chong, Dennis and James N. Druckman. 2011. "Identifying Frames in Political News." in Erik P. Bucy and R. Lance Holbert (Eds.), *The Sourcebook for Political Communication Research: Methods, Measures, and Analytical Techniques* (pp. 238-267). Routledge.

CNN. 2012. "State of the Union with Candy Crowley" December 2, 2012. http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1212/02/sotu.01.html

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* Harper & Row.

Druckman, James N. and Toby Bolsen. 2011. "Framing, Motivated Reasoning, and Opinions About Emergent Technologies." *Journal of Communication* 61(4): 659-688.

Feinberg, Matthew and Robb Willer. 2013. "Persuading Partisans: Targeted Moral Reframing Facilitates Political Influence." Working Paper.

Fenno, Richard F. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts.* Little, Brown and Company.

Gale, William G. and Joel Slemrod. 2001. "Rhetoric and Economics in the Estate Tax Debate." *National Tax Journal* 54(3): 613-627.

Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, David Doherty and Connor M. Dowling. 2011. "Citizens' Policy Confidence and Electoral Punishment: A Neglected Dimension of Electoral Accountability." *Journal of Politics*, 73(4): 1206-1224.

Goren, Paul. 2012. *On Voter Competence.* Oxford University Press.

Gordon, Anne and Jerry L. Miller. 2004. "Values and Persuasion During the First Bush-Gore Presidential Debate." *Political Communication* 21: 71-92.

Grose, Christian R., Neil Malhotra, and Robert P. Van Houweling. In press. "Explaining Explanations: How Legislators Explain their Policy Positions and How Citizens React." *American Journal of Political Science*

Hersh, Eitan D. and Brian F. Schaffner. 2013. "Targeted Campaign Appeals and the Value of Ambiguity." *Journal of Politics* 75(2): 520-534.

Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 2000. *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness.* University of Chicago Press.

Jerit, Jennifer. 2009. "How Predictive Appeals Affect Policy Opinions." *American Journal of Political Science* 53(2): 411-426.

Jessee, Stephen A. 2012. *Ideology and Spatial Voting in American Elections.* Cambridge University Press.

Kingdon, John W. 1973. *Congressmen's Voting Decisions.* Harper & Row.

Lau, Richard R., Richard A. Smith and Susan T. Fiske. 1991. "Political Beliefs, Policy Interpretations, and Political Persuasion." *Journal of Politics* 53(3): 644-675.

Marietta, Morgan. 2008. "From My Cold, Dead Hands: Democratic Consequences of Sacred Rhetoric." *Journal of Politics* 70(3): 767-779.

Marietta, Morgan. 2009. "The Absolutist Advantage: Sacred Rhetoric in Contemporary Presidential Debate." *Political Communication* 26(4): 388-411.

Marietta, Morgan. 2012. *The Politics of Sacred Rhetoric: Absolutist Appeals and Political Persuasion.* Baylor University Press.

McGraw, Kathleen M. 1991. "Managing Blame: An Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts." *American Political Science Review* 85(4): 1133-1157.

McGraw, Kathleen M. 1998. "Manipulating Public Opinion with Moral Justification." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 560: 129-142.

McGraw, Kathleen M., Richard Timpone, and Gabor Bruck. 1993. "Justifying Controversial Political Decisions: Home Style in the Laboratory." *Political Behavior* 15(3): 289-308.

Minson, Julia A., and Benoit Monin. 2012. "Do-Gooder Derogation: Disparaging Morally Motivated Minorities to Defuse Anticipated Reproach." *Social Psychology and Personality Science* 3(2): 200-207.

Nelson, Thomas E. and Jennifer Garst. 2005. "Values-based Political Messages and Persuasion." *Political Psychology* 26(4): 489-515.

Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review* 91(3): 567-583.

Pew Research Center. 2012. October 12 , 2012, "Deep Divisions over Debt Reduction Proposals." http://www.people-press.org/2012/10/12/deep-divisions-over-debt-reduction-proposals/

Rivers, Douglas. 2006. "Sample Matching: Representative Sampling from Internet Samples." Polimetrix White Paper Series.

Schwartz, Shalom H., Gian Vittorio Caprara and Michele Vecchione. 2010. "Basic Personal Values, Core Political Values, and Voting: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Political Psychology* 31(3): 421-452.

Sherman, David K., and Geoffrey L. Cohen. 2006. "The Psychology of Self-Defense: Self-Affirmation Theory." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38: 183-242.

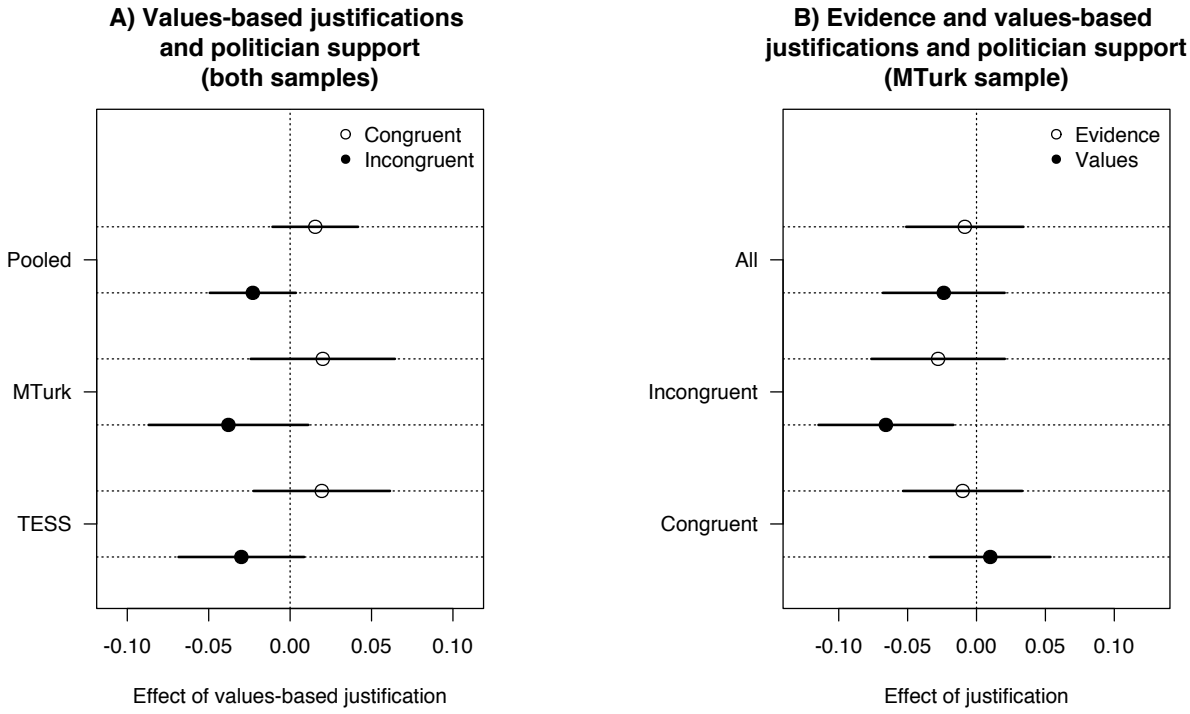
Steele, Claude M. 1988. "The Psychology of Self-Affirmation: Sustaining the Integrity of the Self." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 21: 261-302.

Tomz, Michael and Robert P. Van Houweling. 2008. "Candidate Positioning and Voter Choice." *American Political Science Review* 102(3): 303-318.

White House, 2012. "Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden on Tax Fairness at a Campaign Event." April 12, 2012. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/04/12/remarks-vice-president-joe-biden-tax-fairness-campaign-event

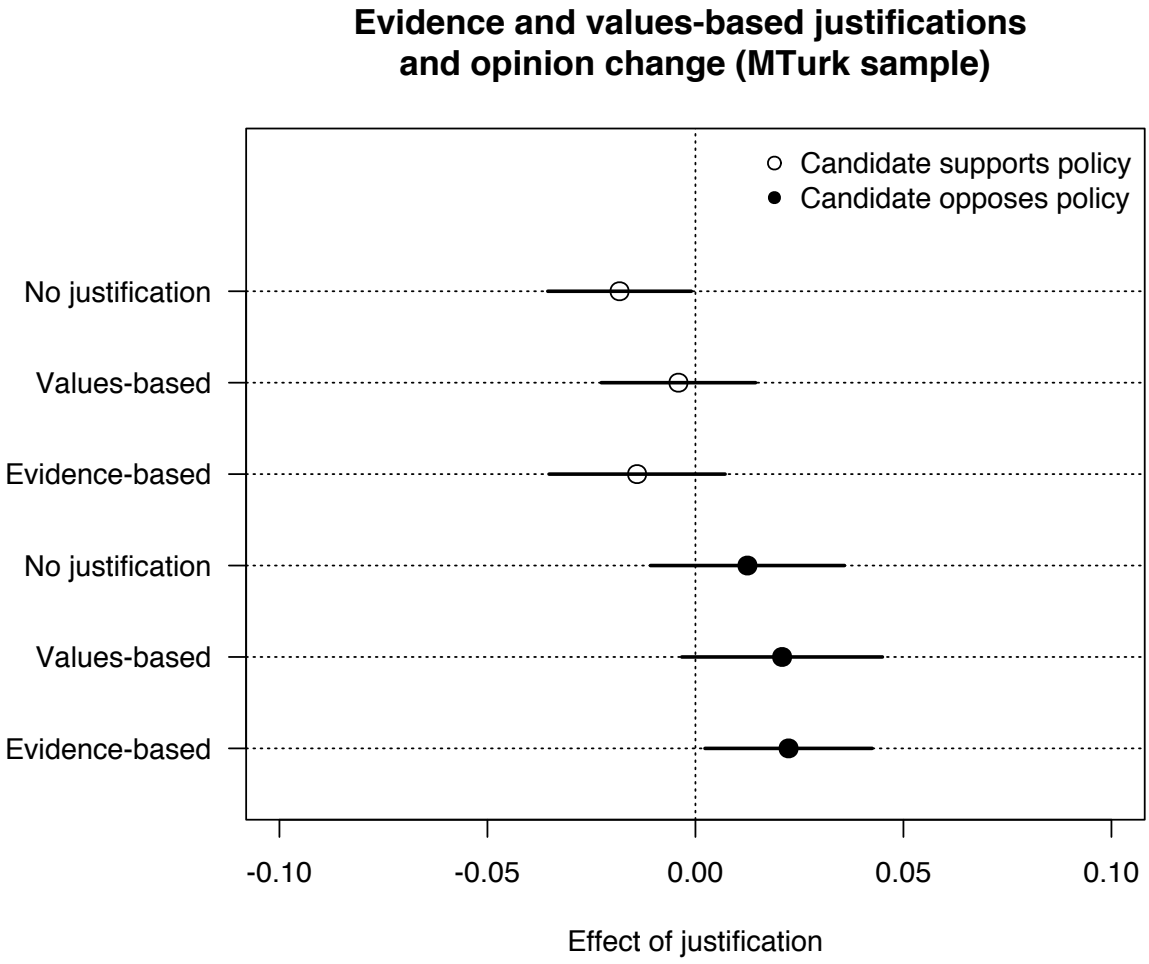
Figures

Figure 1: Candidate Support Results



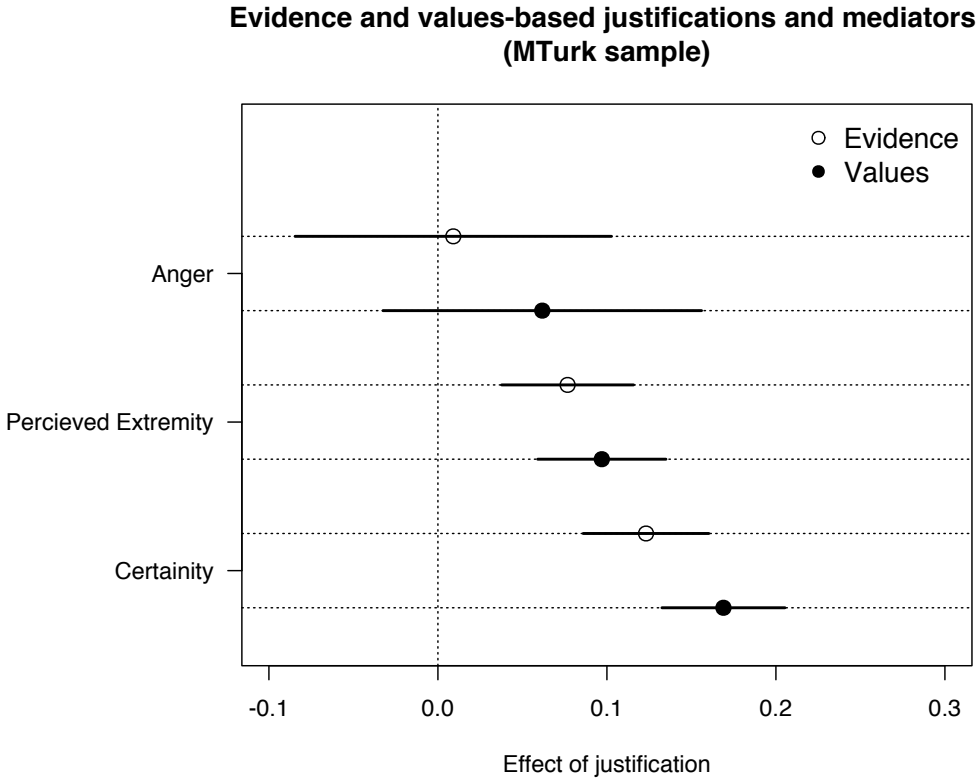
NOTE: Plot reports results from a regression of politician support (measured with a 0-100 scale) on the experimental condition (Evidence or Values based justification) and the congruency between the politician and the respondent (Incongruent or Congruent). The dependent measure is recoded to lie between 0 and 1. Full regression tables are included in the online appendix. In Panel A sample weights are used for the estimates based on the TESS study to weight the results to be nationally representative. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors.

Figure 2: Justifications Fail To Persuade



NOTE: Plot reports results from regression of within-subject pre-post treatment change in policy support (measured on 7-pt scales each time) on treatment condition. This dependent measure is recoded to lie between 0 and 1 to ease interpretation. The idenpendent variables are experimental conditions for each panel. means by experimental treatment conditions. Full regression tables are included in Table S1 in the online appendix. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors.

Figure 3: Assessing Mechanisms



NOTE: Plot reports results from a series of regressions of potential mechanisms variables (all scaled to lie between 0 and 1) on a dummy variable for the type of justification an individual encountered. Full regression tables are included in Table S2 in the online appendix. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals based on robust standard errors.

Tables

Table 1: The effect of justification on politician support

Dependent variable: Support for candidate (0-1)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Incongruent position	-0.334***	-0.412***	-0.385***	-0.394***
	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.014)	(0.023)
Evidence based justification				-0.010
				(0.022)
Incongruent position X Evidence based justification				-0.018
				(0.033)
Value based justification	0.019	0.020	0.015	0.010
	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.013)	(0.022)
Incongruent position X Value based justification	-0.049*	-0.058*	-0.038**	-0.076**
	(0.029)	(0.034)	(0.019)	(0.033)
Mturk study			0.037***	
			(0.010)	
Constant	0.579***	0.661***	0.609***	0.671***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.010)	(0.015)
Omitted condition	Evidence based	Evidence based	Evidence based	Control
Sample	TESS	Mturk	Pooled	Mturk
Observations	2,215	811	3,026	1,218
R-squared	0.287	0.463	0.367	0.449
Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

Appendix A: Treatments

Pro Justifications	
Evidence: Economic growth is the crucial thing to keep in mind when discussing taxes. People may try to make this issue about other things, like their own definition of what fairness means, but I think economic growth is the most important thing to consider here. That's why I supported increasing taxes on wealthy Americans. Tax increases on the wealthy would improve long run growth. A study by a nonpartisan federal agency predicts higher economic growth if increased tax revenues are used to pay down the deficit. Increasing the amount that wealthy individuals pay is an efficient thing to do.	**Values:** Fairness is the crucial thing to keep in mind when discussing taxes. People may try to make this issue about other things, like the predicted impact of the taxes on economic growth, but I think fairness is the most important thing to consider here. That's why I supported increasing taxes on wealthy Americans. Tax increases on the wealthy would be fair. Those who have done well should do their part to contribute to society by paying their fair share of taxes.Increasing the amount that wealthy individuals pay is the right thing to do.
Con Justifications	
Evidence: Economic growth is the crucial thing to keep in mind when discussing taxes. People may try to make this issue about other things, like their own definition of what fairness means, but I think economic growth is the most important thing to consider here. That's why I opposed increasing taxes on wealthy Americans. Tax increases on the wealthy would decrease economic growth. A report by the Federation of Independent Businesses predicts this policy would significantly lower long run economic output. Increasing the amount that wealthy individuals pay is an inefficient thing to do.	**Values:** Fairness is the crucial thing to keep in mind when discussing taxes. People may try to make this issue about other things, like the predicted impact of the taxes on economic growth, but I think fairness is the most important thing to consider here. That's why I opposed increasing taxes on wealthy Americans. Tax increases on the wealthy would be unfair. Wealthy individuals are decent people who earn their money through hard work and should not have to give more of it to the government. Increasing the amount that wealthy individuals pay is the wrong thing to do.