

Priming Personal Perceptions: News Media and the Salience of Personal and National  
Issue Perceptions in Political Evaluations

by

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To my grandfather S. Frederic Guggenheim

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## **Abstract**

Researchers have long been concerned with whether and how individuals link personal interests or concerns to their political evaluations. Previous research shows that the media can influence both personal and national perceptions about political issues as well as the relative weight each has in national political evaluations (Mutz, 1998). However, the conditions under which this phenomenon occurs have not been well delineated. The goal of this dissertation is to examine the conditions under which the news media can link perceptions of personal and national concerns to evaluations of the president and national government by focusing on different types of content and differences among individuals. News priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) is used as the explanation for how information should influence the weight given to personal or national perceptions in national political evaluations. Moreover, the study examines the dynamics of the priming effect by taking into account knowledge, partisanship, interest, and real-world cues as moderators. Methodologically, the study relies on a content analysis of newspaper and television news, and two national survey-based experiments.

Results from the content analysis indicate that newspapers and television news tend to portray politics as psychologically distant on a variety of dimensions, with the exception of temporal distance. The experiments show that proximal and distal news content had the ability to increase the weight of personal and national concerns in national political evaluations; however, it depended both on the characteristics of the

issue at hand as well as differences among the individuals themselves. The experiments suggest that the capacity of the media to prime personal perceptions among the knowledgeable, interested, partisan, and experienced is different for novel issues compared to longstanding ones. Understanding these priming dynamics is important because political priming has both short and long-term consequences for public opinion.

## **Chapter 1 News Media and the Salience of Personal and National Perceptions about Issues in Political Evaluations**

Although simple self-interest was long thought to motivate attitudes and behaviors, especially political judgments and voting decisions (e.g., Downs, 1957), expectations for self-interested behavior often failed to align with empirical work, which documented only small amounts of evidence that people act in their own self-interest (Sears & Funk, 1991). Lane (1962) pointed out that citizens “morselized” their personal experiences, keeping ideas about them separate from their political evaluations. Instead, people tend to rely on their party identification and other values when making policy judgments (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980) and base candidate evaluations and vote choices on their attitudes about the national economy rather than their personal financial circumstances (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979; 1981). Researchers agree that societal judgments weigh heavily in individuals’ political evaluations across a wide range of political outcomes (e.g., Sears & Funk, 1991; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). In fact, individuals seem to rely less on simple self-interest when evaluating national issues than on other concerns.

Findings like these initially led researchers to worry about citizens’ abilities to link their personal concerns and experiences to national conditions. These results also raised questions about the type of information citizens use to hold government accountable and whether citizens were able to do this accurately. Researchers, as a result

of these concerns, turned to two related areas of investigation, with media playing a key role in both. First, researchers examined the origins of personal and national perceptions, especially perceptions about the economy (e.g., Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988; Markus, 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992; Mutz, 1992; 1994; 1998; Weatherford, 1983; Heatherington, 1996; Haller & Norpoth, 1997) but also other issues (Green & Gurkin, 1989; Tyler, 1980). Second, and more importantly for this dissertation, researchers examined the conditions under which personal experiences or perceptions might matter in national evaluations. Findings suggested media use affects the conditions under which personal experiences and perceptions matter for political evaluations (Mutz, 1994; 1998; Duch, Palmer, & Anderson, 2000) and the extent to which national perceptions matter (Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988; Iyengar, 1991; Mutz, 1992; Goidel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997).

In fact, recent research suggests that both personal and national perceptions matter to national level evaluations, although the degree to which each makes a difference is variable and depends on context. This dissertation builds off two types of priming studies that suggest personal and national perceptions can be primed in political evaluations. The first type is survey-based, with origins in sociotropic politics and agenda-setting research, and suggests that national perceptions weigh heavily in presidential evaluations because news tends to be thematic and contextual (Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988; Iyengar, 1991; Gavin, 1997; Goidel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997; Mutz, 1992). However, these studies focus mostly on national perceptions, and the extent to which they account for news coverage is limited to the amount and sometimes the tone. The second type of priming study is experimental, with origins in psychology and sociotropic politics, and

suggests that self-interest can be primed in policy attitudes (Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001; Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010; Young, Thomsen, Borgida, Sullivan, & Aldrich, 1991). These studies are suggestive of the type of content that might be involved in priming, but are not about news or other forms of political communication, and are not theories of media effects. Additionally, the former tradition focuses mostly on presidential evaluations while the later focuses on policy evaluations.

In the studies in this dissertation, I argue that news content that appears proximal should be more likely to prime personal perceptions in national political evaluations, while news content that appears distal should prime national perceptions in national political evaluations. Past work on priming different levels of perception relied on surveys rather than experiments (e.g., Mutz, 1994, 1998). While most news priming research focuses on presidential evaluations and some on party evaluations, this dissertation expands news priming to other types of governmental evaluations. Experimental and survey studies designed to test the conditions under which news priming occurs have often focused on the salience of particular *topics*—a “big message” effect as Althaus and Kim call it (2006). Instead, this study looks at the conditions that might moderate priming of more subtle aspects or dimensions of news content itself. Additionally, the dynamics of the priming effect are not well delineated. Questions about for whom and under what conditions priming might occur are debated in the literature (e.g., in terms of knowledge, Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; van der Brug, Semetko, & Valkenburg, 2007). We still know less about the dynamics of news priming than we do about other phenomenon such as agenda-setting. Therefore, this

study examines several moderators of priming that include real-world cues, political knowledge, and partisanship.

Central to the argument about priming perceptions as well as priming dynamics is the news environment and the type of content involved in the priming effect. To understand this relationship better requires an understanding of when self-interest and societal perceptions matter to political evaluations as well as what news content actually looks like. It also requires an understanding of the conditions under which such a priming effect is most likely to occur. Therefore, this dissertation examines the way in which news stories are written to determine what type of news content might be involved in linking perceptions of personal and national conditions to national level political evaluations. To do so, I draw on theory related to news framing, priming, and construal level theory research dealing with psychological distance to set up expectations for a content analysis, reported in the second chapter, as well as two survey-based experiments discussed in the third and fourth chapters. The content analysis closely examines both television and newspaper coverage of the economy and expands on prior research in this area by examining frames and other content cues that may be considered psychologically proximal or distal. Based on the findings from the content analysis, along with the theoretical groundwork, I use survey-based experiments to test hypotheses about priming in the third and fourth chapters. The first experimental chapter focuses on priming perceptions in economic news, while the second experimental chapter broadens the focus to another issue—the Affordable Health Care Act. These experiments expand on past research related to news priming.



## **Personal and National Perceptions**

Researchers of sociotropic and symbolic politics have been interested in whether people use simple self-interest or other types of judgments when evaluating the president or national policies (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). Scholars of sociotropic politics argue that people base presidential evaluations on their perceptions of national economic conditions rather than personal financial experiences (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981). Similarly, the symbolic politics approach looks at whether simple self-interest or symbolic attitudes more strongly predict citizens' policy attitudes (Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979). Findings show that simple self-interest is frequently subordinate to people's longstanding affective political attachments, such as party identification and political ideology, which were formed by long term political socialization processes (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). Both traditions show that people make self-interested political evaluations far less often than they make collectively oriented or values-oriented evaluations.

However, recent research suggests that self-interested political evaluations are probably underestimated. One reason is that it has been up to researchers, rather than the subjects under investigation, to determine what individuals' self-interest should be; it is usually narrowly defined as material self-interest or direct personal experience, or as I refer to it, as "simple" self-interest. It is clear that while people may not directly experience problems, they may still have related personal concerns. Measures of subjective interest or concern indicate that people have identified an issue as a personal problem, just like they would recognize a national issue as a problem that needed to be dealt with. As a result, personal experiences will be at a comparative disadvantage in

models that compare personal experiences with national perceptions in political evaluations (Gomez & Wilson, 2001; Mutz, 1994; Stoker, 1994). Additionally, Mutz (1992) found that subjective perceptions are more temporally proximal to political outcome variables in the causal chain than actual personal experiences, which also contributes to the disadvantage.

Perceptions of personal conditions, rather than objective experience or researcher-determined self-interest, are a less strict way of both conceptualizing and measuring whether people think of themselves or their own conditions when it comes to a particular issue. Mutz (1992) argued that attitudes are formed based on information influences, so using parallel measures of perceptions or attitudes, rather than pitting simple self-interest against collective attitudes, means that researchers should be better able to measure information effects for both personal and national conditions. Therefore, in this study, I focus on subjective personal and national perceptions because, like others (Funk & Garcia-Monet, 1997; Kinder & Keiwiet, 1981; Mutz, 1994), my emphasis is not on what individuals' true motivations are, but on the types of information they use when they make political evaluations.

Table 1.1 below summarizes the possible ways in which these relationships could be examined. In other words, any of the cells in this table could be compared to one another. In this study, only the right half of the table will be investigated, and subjective individual and subjective collective perceptions will be examined. Although there are several ways to define "national perceptions," in this study, subjective perceptions of national level conditions deal with how others across the nation are doing. In this respect, I follow Mutz's (1994; 1998) definition of collective perceptions. This definition is also

consistent with the sociotropic politics literature where sociotropy deals with making evaluations based on perceptions of conditions other than personal ones. Personal perceptions are how people view their immediate conditions, which can include self-perceptions, but also extends to families because they are often an immediate source of concern.

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Table 1.1. A Comparison of Possible Research Conceptualizations of Personal and National Level Conditions

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	Objective	Subjective
National		X
Personal		X

### **The Role of Media in the Origins of Personal and National Perceptions**

The early findings showing that self-interest did not relate strongly or consistently to political evaluations, and further research showing the same thing for the relationship of personal experience to national perceptions (e.g., Lane, 1962; Tyler, 1980), prompted research on the origins of personal and national perceptions.<sup>1</sup> Studies showed that national perceptions of the economy were shaped at least in part by media portrayals of the actual economy, but also by other factors, such as partisanship (Abramowitz, Lanoue,

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<sup>1</sup> Although several early studies found that personal experiences did not affect national perceptions, later studies found that national perceptions could be shaped partly by both personal experiences and personal perceptions (e.g., Duch, Palmer, & Anderson, 2000; Funk & Garcia-Monet, 1997; Mutz, 1994)

& Ramesh, 1988; Markus, 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1992; Mutz, 1992; 1998; Nadeau, Niemi, Fan & Amato, 1999; Heatherington, 1996; Duch, Palmer, & Anderson, 2000; cf. Haller & Norpoth, 1997). Similarly, studies of crime attitudes led Tyler (1980; Tyler & Cook, 1984; Tyler & Lavrakas, 1983) to propose the impersonal impact hypothesis, which suggested that media tend to affect impersonal (societal or national) perceptions rather than personal ones.

Personal perceptions, on the other hand, are shaped by personal experiences (Mutz, 1992; 1998; Weatherford, 1983); however, personal perceptions can be influenced by other factors, also including media. For example, Nadeau, Niemi, and Amato (2000) found that both news media and actual inflation rates affected personal perceptions of the economy in Britain. Goidel, Procopio, Terrell, and Wu (2010) found local news was related to personal economic perceptions. Cultivation and risk perception studies have also found that the media can affect personal perceptions (e.g., Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003; Shrum & Bischak, 2001; Coleman, 1993; Morton & Duck, 2001; Snyder & Rouse, 1995) although media influence tends to be less common than other factors.

### **Personal and National Perceptions in Political Evaluations**

In addition to shaping national perceptions, news about national political issues such as the economy can directly affect presidential and other national evaluations. Negative news on different topics can persuade people not to vote for the incumbent—studies show that negative news about the economy can affect candidate support and vote choice (Nadeau et al., 1999; Shah, Watts, Domke, Fan, & Fibison, 1999). Although political evaluations, national perceptions, and personal perceptions can all be directly

shaped by the media, the news media also have a role in specifying the conditions under which different perceptions might influence national political evaluations (Mutz, 1994; 1998). In particular, people may sometimes place more weight on personal perceptions or on national perceptions when making political evaluations and media coverage should have a role in this process. As with these other effects, when and how much weight people put on each is likely to vary depending on conditions.

### **News Priming**

Priming occurs when exposure to information or an event activates a construct in audience members' memories, which then informs subsequent judgments that they make. News priming in particular often involves exposure to particular news stories on particular topics or issues which make that issue relevant to later political judgments (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Iyengar and Kinder argued that priming is of particular importance for political evaluations because it changes the standards individuals use when making decisions, on the basis of what has been emphasized in the media. The priming effect has been investigated in a variety of ways, using survey data, often over an extended time period (Goidel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Malhotra & Krosnick, 2007; Mutz, 1998), and experimentally (Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McGraw & Ling, 2003; Miller & Krosnick, 2000).

News priming research has primarily examined how news influences which topics individuals use to judge presidential performance (e.g., Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Miller & Krosnick, 2000), although other types of judgments are possible as well, such as vote

choice (Mendelsohn, 1996; Sheafer & Weimann, 2005), evaluations of candidate characteristics (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), policy evaluations (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005), and party evaluations (Sheafer, 2007). Additionally, early models of news priming were issue priming, where different issues could carry more or less weight in subsequent evaluations; however, others have since argued that more subtle aspects of issues can serve as primes (Althaus & Kim, 2006), including that a particular framing of an issue can serve as a prime (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Hwang, Gotlieb, Nah, & McLeod, 2006; Ju, 2004). While some issues can be made more accessible than others when people make subsequent evaluations, different dimensions of an issue may also be made accessible through priming.

Priming is not a model of attitude change and thus affects attitudes in a different way from persuasion. In the priming process, it is thought that the weight people give to different criteria will change how later evaluations are made without necessarily changing the subsequent evaluation itself. That is, priming may not directly alter the attitudes that people have, rather, priming affects what criteria are most relevant to their opinion or subsequent judgment (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). Thus, priming works by bringing to mind individuals' pre-existing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. For example, if national economic perceptions are being primed, then a news message should be able to make pre-existing perceptions about the economy more relevant than other considerations, which would then be used in evaluations of the president or economic policies—without actually changing those attitudes.

## **News Priming of Perceptions**

News priming research has frequently focused on the relative strength different policy issues play in presidential evaluations. This research, as an outgrowth of agenda-setting, argues that the more news coverage an issue receives, the more likely people are to use that issue in their presidential evaluations, especially in comparison to other issues that receive less coverage (e.g., Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). As a political issue, the economy received a great deal of attention from news priming researchers because of how frequently it has topped the news agenda. Researchers found that the relative number of economic news stories was related to presidential evaluations (Goidel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997; Iyengar & Kinder, 1997; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Pan & Kosicki, 1997); when the economy received more coverage than other issues, it was weighted more heavily in presidential evaluations than other issues, such as foreign policy, but when foreign policy was more prominent it outweighed the economy.

Several researchers have pointed out that these studies share important elements with sociotropic politics research and have suggested that national economic perceptions are probably strongly linked to presidential evaluations because of news media emphasis on the economy (Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988; Gavin, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Mutz, 1992). Mutz (1992) argued that the media have a “sociotropic priming” effect—the media does not merely increase the weight of an issue in presidential evaluations, but it can increase the weight of national perceptions in political evaluations and decrease the weight of personal perceptions. Tests related to this premise found that the media had an indirect link to presidential evaluations through their influence on national perceptions

and sometimes personal ones (Mutz, 1992; 1994; Nadeau, Niemi, & Amato, 2000; see also Duch, Palmer, & Anderson, 2000; Goidel, Shields, & Peffley, 1997; Sheaffer, 2007).

A few studies examined this effect by looking specifically at the interaction between media and economic perceptions in political evaluations, allowing researchers to determine whether amount of media used was linked to the weight of individuals' perceptions in national evaluations. Heatherington (1996) found that, compared to light media consumers, heavy media consumers national perceptions weighted more heavily in their vote choice (during the 1992 elections). He also found that personal perceptions and media use can influence national perceptions, although the extent to which this was true varied depending on the election context. Mutz (1992) found that higher levels of news use are associated with weighting national concerns more heavily than personal ones. Specifically, among regular readers of newspapers, there was a significant relationship between perceptions that unemployment in the country had gotten better and support for the president. Among occasional and non-readers, being less worried about personal unemployment had a relationship with presidential support. Consistent with these studies, Weatherford (1983) found that heavier newspaper users weighted perceptions of national business conditions more heavily in evaluations of the president's economic performance, while light readers weighted perceptions of personal finances more heavily.

Mutz (1994; 1998) examined the priming of personal and national perceptions in political evaluations, but moved away from the sociotropic priming hypothesis. Instead, she argued that personal experiences can become politically important when people are exposed to others with similar experiences to their own through the mass media. This is because the media allow individuals to learn that their personal experiences are not



isolated but shared by many. Particularly, media provide audiences with representations of the experiences of others—for example, in the presentation of unemployment statistics. She suggested that for individuals' personal experiences or perceptions to be politicized, they would need to see that the tone and amount of news coverage matched their personal considerations; otherwise people would use other considerations in their political evaluations (Mutz, 1998). Indeed, she found this was true for both heavy and light news consumers as long as there was heavy unemployment coverage (1994; 1998). Specifically, for those with low news exposure, heavy unemployment coverage resulted in lower presidential approval ratings where individuals had personal unemployment experience. For those who were heavy news consumers, high unemployment coverage was linked to lower approval ratings for those who were more concerned about unemployment. She also found, in keeping with the sociotropic priming hypothesis, that heavy coverage and high exposure increased the weight of national perceptions in national evaluations. In other words, among heavy news users, high levels of unemployment coverage primed both personal and national perceptions in political evaluations.

These studies suggest that, at least for heavy media users, the news can prime both personal and national perceptions in political evaluations. However, these findings are limited in several respects. First, they rest on the argument that news coverage on an issue must be heavy. For example, in the absence of heavy unemployment coverage, Mutz (1994) was not able to find priming effects. The argument that news coverage on an issue must be heavy to have a priming effect is consistent with survey studies of news priming; however, not all priming research rests on the argument about heavy coverage (e.g., Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). In fact, all of the issue priming studies

discussed above that focused on the economy and the perception priming studies are based on arguments about the amount of coverage. Also implicit in this research is that the content of news is both negative and tends to focus on national level portrayals of an issue. Both Mutz's (1994) and Heatherington's (1996) studies suggest that it is negative portrayals of the economy that are generating the priming effect. In particular, when considering heavy coverage, Mutz (1994) looks at heavy unemployment coverage, which is a negatively valenced issue. Heatherington (1996) argues that economic news coverage was negative in the year he expected to find priming effects; however, he did not directly or indirectly test coverage. Additionally, this type of priming of personal and national perceptions is limited to the realm of perceptions of the economy.

### **What Type of Information Primes Personal and National Perceptions?**

Because research on priming personal and national perceptions has been survey-based, little work has examined the type of news content that should contribute to the effect. Instead, the studies of priming national perceptions of the economy discussed above focus on media dosage arguments—in other words, when the number of news stories about the economy increases, national perceptions of the economy should factor into presidential evaluations. While the *amount of coverage* can have these effects, the *type of coverage* should be able to as well. Experiments have allowed researchers to investigate priming at the level of an individual message and can take into account more subtle aspects of news coverage.

In contrast to arguments about the number of messages allowing priming effects to occur, those who have investigated priming effects experimentally suggest that subtle

aspects of messages have priming capabilities. Cappella, Lerman, Romantan, and Baruh (2005) define priming as “the process of activating specific nodes in an audience’s mental storehouse of information through cues employed within the media’s message,” (480). That cues in larger messages can prime different considerations in subsequent attitudes were found in studies examining product-related cues (Yi, 1990) and racial cues (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Moreover, particular issue frames, which can be seen as a type of cue (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998) can also serve as primes (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Hwang, Gotlieb, Nah, & McLeod, 2006; Ju, 2004). In these studies, the subtlety of the cues have varied from implicit racial cues to more explicit issue framing, and all found that the content could activate certain perceptions or attitudes in subsequent evaluations or judgments. By paying attention to particular message characteristics, these experimenters generated priming effects.

However, few studies have examined the type of message characteristics—whether frames or cues—that could activate thoughts at different levels of evaluation (i.e., personal or societal) by using different types of message content, which differs from the media priming studies discussed in the previous section. A small number of experiments have attempted to prime simple self-interest, personal, or national perceptions in political evaluations or policy attitudes. For example, a few experimental studies have primed the salience of the self in policy evaluations (e.g., Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001; Joslyn & Haider-Markel, 2002; Young, Thomsen, Borgida, Sullivan, & Aldrich, 1991).

Chong, Citrin, and Conley (2001) prime self-interest and collective values when asking respondents which policy they would prefer: one reducing the amount of Social Security paid to retirees or one that would increase Social Security taxes. Self-interest

was primed by asking respondents which proposal would benefit them financially while collective values was primed by asking which proposal would benefit future generations. Among those receiving the self-interest prime, there were strong effects of age on policy preference such that older respondents were less likely to support decreasing Social Security payouts to retirees; however, in the collective values condition, the effects of age disappeared. In other words, being primed to consider their simple self-interest led to more self-interested responses, while being primed to consider collective others led simple self-interest to disappear. Additionally, Chong and his colleagues point out that the collective values condition was about the distant future and suggested that being primed to think about the future elicits thoughts about others.

Messages emphasizing the self or the national good using cues about social norms can also prime simple self-interest or concerns about others when making political evaluations. For example, Miller and his colleagues have found self-interest can be induced by norms (Miller & Ratner, 1998; Miller, 1999; Ratner & Miller, 2001). He and his colleagues argue that people from Western cultures are aware of the idea that others are guided by their own self-interest. They find that this norm of self-interest can be primed to influence individuals to act in accordance with that norm or to expect others to act in accordance with that norm. Likewise, another study showed researchers could prime simple self-interest in policy evaluations by experimentally exposing people to conversations about using self-interest or other concerns when evaluating policy (Young, Thompsen, Borgida, Sullivan, & Aldrich, 1991). However, these studies and Chong, Citrin, & Conley's (2001) study discussed above are not about media priming.

News framing experiments suggest that some types of information can make perceptions of national conditions more or less relevant in political evaluations. Iyengar (1991) found news stories framed thematically, or portraying events as linked together in a larger context, can help people link issues to governmental responsibility and encourage them to hold government responsible for national conditions. On the other hand, stories showing events as exemplars (using episodic frames), can discourage people from politicizing their perceptions of national problems; people were less likely to make national political evaluations when confronted with episodic frames.

Joslyn and Haider-Markel (2002) examined the issues of social security reform using individual rights frames (i.e., “you” and “your own decisions”) and equality frames (i.e., “all of us” and “our. . .shared responsibility”). They argued that individual rights frames should increase the accessibility of the issue as it related to the individual respondent while the equality frames should increase the accessibility of the issue as it relates to the group, although they did not measure accessibility. They did, however, find that the frames affected individuals’ policy support, such that more people opposed changing social security when they received the equality frames (because social security is a policy based on egalitarianism, they argued) while they supported changing it when they received the individualistic frame. While they did not look at the priming of personal and national perceptions, they did find that exposure to policy framed as personal and national values had a persuasive effect, in that it shifted policy support. Both Joslyn and Haider-Markel’s (2002) study and the studies conducted by Chong and colleagues (2001) show that citizens will use simple self-interest when the issue makes personal relevance

clear through framing and suggests that people will use primed perceptions of the collective to evaluate policies when they appeal to collective values.

Another study on framing shows that personal and societal framing may be differentially persuasive where people have to make evaluations at different levels of abstraction from personal conditions. Nan (2007) framed public transportation and smoking public service announcements as either a personal or societal good, relying on construal level theory to make predictions about the persuasiveness of the frames. She found that when people made evaluations for others, societal framing appeared more persuasive than when people made the same evaluations for themselves. Participants were more likely to agree with health recommendations in the societally framed condition for socially distant others (i.e., an average undergraduate) rather than themselves. Likewise, the more distant that others were perceived, the more salient societal outcomes became. However, she did not find differences between personal and societally framed messages for their level of persuasiveness or for the salience of personal or societal outcomes. Nevertheless, her study shows that perceptions of social distance in media messages can influence evaluations of societal outcomes; specifically that societal framing was relevant for more distant evaluations.

In fact, the notion of psychological distance from construal level theory (CLT; Trope & Liberman, 2003; 2011) provides a useful framework for the type of message content or characteristics that might prime personal and societal level perceptions in political evaluations. Although it is not a theory of media effects and does not deal with media messages, CLT researchers argue that information can feel psychologically close or distant to a person depending on how it is portrayed. This impression of being near or

distant causes people to think at different levels of abstraction. Closer psychological distances lead people to focus on details of events or information while events or issues that appear further away tend to be analyzed more abstractly. Psychological distance can be conveyed by several proximal-distal dimensions. These include time, physical or spatial distance, and social distance (e.g., us vs. them). For example, the further away something appears in time, the more salient abstract elements become, while the closer something appears in time, the more salient concrete aspects of an issue become: while thinking about the distant future, people said they were watching television, but while thinking about the near future, they were flipping channels (Liberman & Trope, 1998). The distant future also appears to bring to mind other abstract elements such as values (Trope & Liberman, 2011; Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010) and morals (Eyal, Liberman, & Trope, 2008).

Mass communication researchers have suggested that different aspects of distance are inherent in news coverage, such as in studies of news content and newsworthiness, cultivation, and news framing. For example, research has contrasted physical distance through national and local crime news coverage on risk perceptions (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). In framing studies, Iyengar (1991) compared stories that tied together events at the national level with ones that depicted national events through individual exemplars. In terms of time frames, studies on newsworthiness have argued that the media have a bias on the present rather than discussing the future (Patterson, 1998). Although these researchers do not examine distance using CLT nor do they link different types of distance together, CLT provides a useful framework for thinking about how

news or other types of media messages rely on proximal and distal information, especially where it relates to personal and collective perceptions.

CLT has been applied to research examining framing in policy evaluations. Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, and Chaiken (2009) argue that symbolic politics research suggests political policy attitudes are predicted by values because they are construed at the abstract societal level, rather than by concrete, personal concerns. Hunt and her colleagues (2010) use CLT to predict when people will be more likely to use simple self-interest or values in policy decisions. They argue that values should be most relevant in conditions perceived as distant because values are abstract, and they hypothesize that financial self-interest should be more relevant in conditions appearing close because self-interest is more concrete. They find that students rely on financial self-interest to evaluate their support for a proposed tuition hike when it is presented as happening next semester while they use values related to social dominance orientation to evaluate it when it is presented as happening next year (i.e., in the distant future).

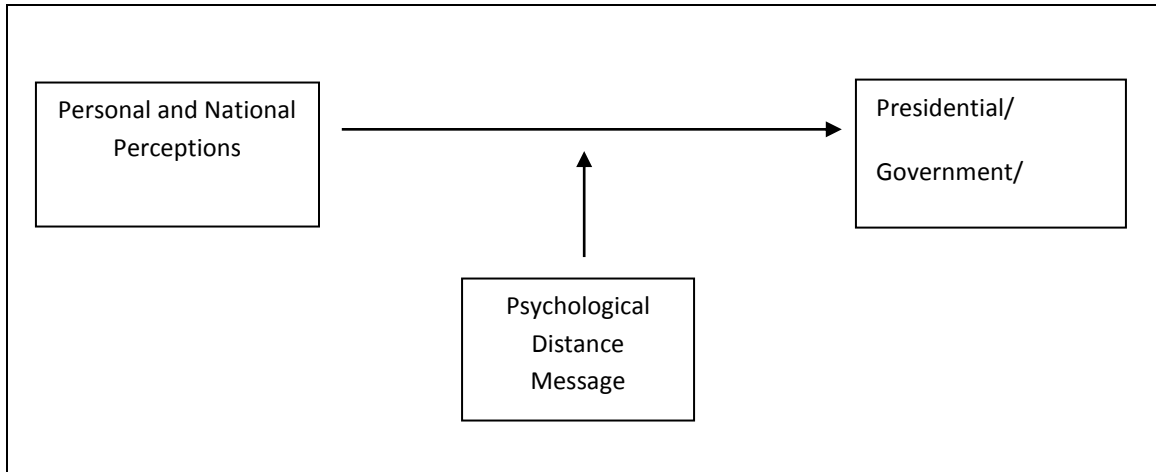
These studies show how CLT has been used to suggest that societal or distant future frames can invoke abstract level thinking, and that near future frames can strengthen the relationship between policy support and simple self-interest. In that messages framed using closer psychological distances can bring simple self-interest to mind and that messages framed as being psychologically further away can lead to abstract thinking, the theory is suggestive of the type of content that might bring to mind more concrete personal perceptions and more abstract national perceptions. As such, it is useful as a framework for identifying different dimensions of near and distant content. Messages can be portrayed as occurring in the near or distant future, as being about the



self or about distant others or as happening locally or farther away. Using the CLT framework, the studies in this dissertation examine temporal distance and societal distance as two dimensions of news content.

Figure 1.1 shows the general model of priming being used in this dissertation. It specifies that the media messages that are being used as primes are based on differing types and degrees of psychological distance. Specifically, the messages in the first survey experiment will use subtle individual and societal cues as well as subtle near and distant future cues. In the second survey experiment, the messages will be framed in terms of individual and societal consequences. Figure 1.1 also shows that both personal and national perceptions are the considerations being primed in national evaluations. The general hypothesis for the dissertation is that among those who receive messages portraying an issue as proximal, personal perceptions should be more salient in national evaluations than messages portraying the issue distally. Likewise an issue portrayed distally should increase the salience of national perceptions in national evaluations relative to proximal messages. The complete specifications of the hypotheses can be found in Chapters 3 and 4. In addition to the more general priming hypothesis, moderators will be examined to determine for which individuals the priming effects are the strongest and for whom they will be weakest.

Figure 1.1 Proposed Moderation Analysis in Perception Priming



### **The Conditions Under Which Perception Priming Can Occur**

Previous literature suggests that certain conditions can strengthen or weaken the priming effect (e.g., Druckman & Holmes, 2004; Iyengar & Kinder, 1997; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). In particular, past priming research has focused on political sophistication, particularly the role of knowledge as a moderator of the priming effect (Druckman & Holmes, 2004; Hwang, et al., 2006; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; McGraw & Ling, 2003; Miller & Krosnick, 1996; 2000). Knowledge was originally of particular concern to priming researchers because it was presumed that the least knowledgeable would not have the cognitive capacities to resist the effects of priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1997; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), although evidence turned out to be mixed. Knowledge continues to receive attention as a priming moderator both because of the mixed findings and because it tends to be an important condition for specifying priming effects. Partisanship has also been considered an important moderator

of communication effects although, as a moderator of priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Malhotra & Margalit, 2010) it has been subject to fewer tests than knowledge. Finally, real-world cues, or direct personal experiences, which have been extensively investigated in studies on the formation of national perceptions, particularly agenda-setting, cultivation, and sociotropic politics research, may also play a role in specifying the conditions under which perception priming may occur. Each of these potential moderators for perception priming is discussed below.

### **Political Knowledge and Sophistication**

Political knowledge can make a difference for whether people are more likely to rely on personal or national perceptions when they vote for president or evaluate political candidates. However, there is a debate about who will be most likely to link personal and national perceptions with presidential evaluations (e.g., Gomez & Wilson, 2001; Weatherford, 1983). Gomez and Wilson (2001) argue that sophisticated voters should be more likely to consider their pocketbook than less sophisticated voters when evaluating the president because only the highly sophisticated have the ability to understand how their pocketbook is being affected by governmental policy. In their view, the less sophisticated should just assume that the president has more control over the economy than he actually does and should tend to vote sociotropically. They find that both the less sophisticated and more sophisticated rely on national perceptions of the economy in their vote choices, but only as people become more sophisticated do they also rely on perceptions of personal conditions. Mutz (1993) found similar effects for presidential approval. Although this argument does not account for the role of the news media, it does

suggest that political knowledge is an important condition for when personal and national perceptions factor into presidential evaluations.

Knowledge is also an important condition for the strength of priming effects. Although early priming studies suggested that the least knowledgeable would be most susceptible to priming effects (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), researchers later argued that the knowledgeable are most likely to manifest priming effects since they already have information stored on an issue that can be accessed from memory when priming occurs (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; cf. McGraw & Ling, 2003). Empirical tests of knowledge as a moderator of priming show that the knowledgeable are sometimes more affected (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Miller & Krosnick, 2000), while other times the findings are reversed (Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), and still other studies have failed to find knowledge moderating at all (van der Brug, Semetko, & Valkenburg, 2007). Mixed findings could be the result of differences in research design or measurement. However, it is likely that the type of issue affects whether the more or less knowledgeable will be more susceptible to priming.

Several studies suggest that stronger priming effects are likely to occur among the most knowledgeable where issues are complicated or novel, while those who are less knowledgeable should be more easily primed on simpler issues or ones that have been on the agenda longer. McGraw and Ling (2003) found that for the novel issue they chose, priming was more pronounced among the knowledgeable, while for the longstanding issue of abortion the pattern appeared to be the opposite, priming the least knowledgeable. Druckman and Holmes (2004) found that the novel issues in their

study—9/11 and the war in Afghanistan—were primed only among the most knowledgeable, but that the easier issue of perceptions of presidential leadership were primed only among the least knowledgeable. Likewise, Ladd (2007) found that the least knowledgeable experienced direct changes in their presidential approval after 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan began, but that the most knowledgeable experienced a priming effect such that defense policy attitudes were weighted more heavily in their presidential approval. Therefore, it seems likely that both the type of issue and knowledge differences between individuals are important to take into account when specifying the conditions under which priming is more or less likely to occur.

However, knowledge is only one aspect of the larger concept of political sophistication. Another dimension of sophistication is political interest. Political interest has also been investigated as a priming moderator (Iyengar & Kinder, 1997; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993). Findings on interest have also been mixed; Iyengar and Kinder (1997) found political interest did not moderate priming, while Krosnick and Brannon (1993) found that high amounts of interest minimized the priming effect. Additionally, Krosnick and Brannon found that political interest does not necessarily produce similar priming effects as knowledge. Political interest is different from knowledge in other ways as well; it is usually temporally antecedent to knowledge (Neuman, 1986). It has also been considered as a motivating factor that can help contribute to learning and help overcome knowledge gaps (Kwak, 1999). However, it is closely related to knowledge as a component of sophistication and for some is seen as interchangeable with knowledge (Zaller, 1990). It seems likely that political interest should produce priming effects similar to knowledge, since those who are interested should be more attentive to

messages and more likely to have similar capacities to deal with new or long-standing issues.

### **Partisanship**

Like political knowledge, partisanship is considered important in evaluating the effects of political communication. Partisanship can often make a difference in how political messages or campaigns are interpreted, and those who are often most strongly affected are independents. Independents are more likely to shift opinions during campaigns than partisans (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Hillygus and Jackman (2003) found that partisans and independents used political information differently and that independents were more responsive to campaign events, such as conventions and debates. Others have found that the effects of political messages tend to appear among independents rather than partisans (e.g., Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Weinberger & Westen, 2008). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) also found that agenda-setting was more common in independents than strong partisans. They argued, “Independents who look at the political world without the cognitive benefits of a partisan lens may as a consequence be more vulnerable to the views of national life conveyed by the networks,” (pg. 55).

On the other hand, research shows that the moderation of priming effects may be more subtle than merely affecting independents. Partisanship is likely to moderate priming effects where explicit partisan cues are present in the message (Malhotra & Margalit, 2010). Even in the absence of explicit cues or partisan labels, partisanship can moderate priming. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) found that Democrats and Republicans

were primed differently depending on the issue. For example, priming was stronger for Democrats on the environment and civil rights, while it was stronger among Republicans for arms control and defense. In other words, they found priming was enhanced where an issue matched people's partisan priorities. These findings suggested priming should be stronger among people who are predisposed to accept a message on that topic. Moreover, Iyengar and Kinder found that where the content of a primed story matched preconceived notions of blame for the president, priming effects were stronger. That is, priming was strengthened if the content of the primed story fit with predispositions to blame the president and weaker when it opposed these predispositions. These results fit with psychological research suggesting that where partisan attitudes on issues are more accessible, the strength between their perceptions on those issues and candidate evaluations will be stronger (Fazio & Williams, 1986).

In sum, partisanship seems to be an important conditioning factor. It is likely that partisanship moderates if either the content itself provides information or cues about partisan positions or the topic or content aligns with the priorities of the parties. Additionally, expectations for who is most likely to be primed appear to depend on the message content itself. Priming research shows partisans will be primed where message content fits with predispositions. On the other hand, independents are often affected by messages, most likely because partisan attitudes or positions are less accessible to them and they lack the ability to reject messages in the same way as partisans who can use those filters.

## Real-World Cues

Finally, real-world cues, which have been extensively investigated in studies on the media's role in contributing to national perceptions, such as agenda-setting, cultivation, and sociotropic politics, may help specify the ways in which perception priming may occur. Cultivation researchers compared how well mediated information held up in comparison to political information learned from direct personal experience—or real-world cues—especially in terms of whether views on crime were shaped from actual experience with crime or from television coverage of crime (e.g., Gross & Aday, 2003; Hirsch, 1980). However, examining real-world cues gained prominence in agenda-setting research. Agenda-setting hypothesizes that the public will perceive a particular topic as more or less important depending on the amount of coverage it receives (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Researchers originally believed real-world cues should override media formed beliefs because the ability to draw on personal experiences to make issue judgments would carry more weight than information gleaned from television and newspapers. However, an alternative perspective suggests that personal experience should enhance media effects. Two ways this was studied were through “issue obtrusiveness” (Zucker, 1978) and real-world cues (Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980).<sup>2</sup>

Researchers argued that agenda-setting would be more frequent for unobtrusive issues, where people have little personal experience on which to rely. For example,

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<sup>2</sup> Issue obtrusiveness is the degree to which an issue is likely to be felt personally (i.e., individuals would be likely to experience an issue even in the absence of news exposure), although it is researcher determined. Unobtrusive issues are ones that are not likely to be directly experienced. Real-world cues are direct personal experience, but have been operationalized as an individual's personal experience in individual level studies and as indices, such as the fuel index and consumer price index, in aggregate level studies.



researchers comparing issues based on their obtrusiveness found that agenda-setting was strongest for issues the researchers classified as unobtrusive (Soroka, 2002; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981; Watt, Mazza, & Snyder, 1993). However, others found agenda-setting for obtrusive issues (Winter, Eyal, & Rogers, 1982; Lee, 2004).

Additionally, when researchers took into account real-world measures, such as the fuel and utilities index, media still affected the public agenda (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Demers, Craff, Choi, & Pessin, 1989) and obtrusive issues had agenda-setting effects even taking into account real-world cues (Demers et al., 1989). However, these studies were conducted at the aggregate level. Using individual level data helped researchers determine individuals' actual experience with particular issues. Using this perspective, Erbring and his colleagues found both newspaper reading and first-hand experience affected judgments of problem importance even when both were considered at the same time (Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980). In another study, Singer (2011) found that those who are unemployed are likely to perceive the economy as more salient than those who are employed.

These examinations of real-world cues were concerned with the direct effects of personal situations on perceptions of the most important problem. As moderators, real-world cues can specify the relationship between news media use and perceptions of national problems as well as national political evaluations (Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Mutz, 1994; 1998). Personal experience should help people link their attitudes with their political evaluations. Those who are affected by an issue may be more sensitive to it which may lead them to be more attentive to the issue in the news (Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980) and have more accessible

attitudes on the issue. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) call this the “readiness hypothesis” and note that people are “predisposed to accept the news that *their* problem is a serious one for the country—and are therefore especially susceptible to media influence,” (p. 48).

Tests of this perspective show that real-world cues can facilitate effects of media messages at the individual level (e.g., Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Mutz, 1994; 1998). Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980) found that, for audience members who were personally affected by issues or especially sensitive to them (specifically crime and unemployment), even low amounts of exposure to media content on that topic were more likely to have an agenda-setting effect compared to those who lacked first-hand experience. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) found that the personal relevance of an issue interacted with news coverage such that viewers who were personally affected by an issue were also most strongly affected by the news. For example, social security stories had stronger priming effects on older respondents than younger ones. Civil rights stories also primed black participants more than white ones.

Likewise, real-world experience can strengthen the relationship between attitudes and policy support. Crano (1997) reexamined Sears et al.’s (1979) study on bussing. The original study found that symbolic (racial) attitudes were linked to support of bussing children to achieve integration, while self-interest, such as having a child that would be bussed, was not strongly related. Crano argued that the symbolic politics approach overlooked the importance of self-interest, or real-world experience, by ignoring whether the relationship between racial attitude and policy support would differ as a consequence of self-interest. His reanalysis showed that this was the case (see also, Sivacek & Crano, 1982; Lehman & Crano, 2002). Although his study is not a study of media effects, it

shows that those with personal experience on an issue should have more accessible attitudes related to the issue that can potentially help people link their attitudes with their political evaluations and choices.

Mutz (1998) expands on the idea that real-world experiences are an important moderating variable by arguing that personal experience and media will interact to affect public opinion: “it is only when media coverage . . . coincide with personal experience that these [personal] experiences take on . . . political significance,” (p. 152). She found that for those low in media consumption, real-world cues (unemployment experience) factored into more negative evaluations of the president during heavy periods of unemployment coverage. High unemployment coverage and personal experience with unemployment were associated with lower levels of presidential approval among people who were generally not exposed to heavy news coverage. On the other hand, she argues that when media coverage differs from personal situations (for example, in situations of low unemployment coverage when a person is unemployed), then individuals may be less likely to hold politicians accountable.

Although simple self-interest (as determined by researchers) does not often factor directly into national level political evaluations in a strong and predictable way (Sears & Funk, 1991), it can sometimes strengthen the relationship between attitudes and political evaluations. Messages related to personal experiences should be able to activate individuals’ prior knowledge on the issue. Real-world experiences should be more accessible and therefore more easily activated when primed; exposure to an issue in the real-world provides people with a store of knowledge on a particular issue and may sensitize them to more readily process information they come across related to the issue.

## **Plan for Chapters**

The plan for the chapters is first to determine empirically how often the media uses personal, aggregated, and distal types of content characteristics. The second and third chapters are designed to test different dimensions of content to see whether they can make personal or societal considerations more salient in individuals' political evaluations. The methods used as well as the specific hypotheses will be explained in detail in each of the chapters. However, below are chapter summaries that explain what each chapter of the dissertation is designed to do in the context of the larger project.

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the dissertation, which provides the theoretical basis for predictions in later chapters as well as an overview of the literature. This chapter examines the extensive investigations into personal and national perceptions of social and political issues that have been made in the fields of political science, social psychology, and communication. It also suggests why priming theories can explain how people come to weight either national or personal perceptions more heavily in political evaluations. It explains how the concept of psychological distance (from construal level theory) provides a framework through which the specific types of content that can produce both personal and societal level salience in political evaluations can be identified. Finally, it discusses which individuals should be most susceptible to priming and which should be least susceptible to priming.

Chapter 2 discusses a content analysis of both television and newspaper news stories. It takes economic news as the issue of interest because much of the work examining the relative weight of personal and national perceptions in political

evaluations has come from the sociotropic politics literature. Research suggests that the reason for the prevalence of sociotropic findings in survey research has been news media's emphasis on the economy and ability to prime national level responses (e.g., Mutz, 1992). Theorizing about the type of content that may produce this effect has been more limited, however. Mutz's (1998) research has argued that portrayals of the collective—collective experiences through the use of aggregates such as the unemployment rate and collective opinion through the use of aggregated opinion in polling data—have become common enough in contemporary media content to explain the findings in much of this work. However, other research has hinted that physical distance (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003), social distance (Nan, 2007) and temporal distance (Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010) may also produce these effects, so dimensions of psychological distance in addition to collective representations are examined in the content.

Chapter 3 continues to look at economic news, but this chapter focuses on the effects of two of the message characteristics examined in the content analysis, specifically, social and temporal distance. The chapter uses an experiment embedded in a large scale national survey to see whether personal and national perceptions of an issue can be made salient in individuals' subsequent evaluations of government and presidential support. Like the content analysis, it continues to expand on the sociotropic politics tradition by examining economic news, in this case, news about inflation. Inflation news was chosen as a case because it had not been receiving heavy coverage in the news at the time of the study. It also looks at political sophistication, real-world cues, and party identification as priming moderators.

Chapter 4 also uses as its basis the findings from the content analysis to test whether news framing can prime personal and national issue perceptions. However, it goes beyond economic news as the case under investigation to see how the process can be expanded to other issues. It takes up the Affordable Health Care Act to see whether portraying that policy in terms of individual or societal costs and benefits can shift the salience of personal and national perceptions in policy and presidential performance evaluations. Unlike the inflation experiment, it was chosen because it received heavy coverage. Like the previous chapter, it relies methodologically on a national survey experiment.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines how well the studies performed as a whole by making connections between them. Moreover, it describes some of the limitations of the studies and how future work can address them. Finally, it suggests where examining personal appeals in other types of mass communication, including political advertising and local news, might provide us with further insights about public opinion.

## **Chapter 2 The Collective and Distal Nature of Economic News**

This chapter investigates the news media environment through a content analysis, using the case of economic news. Previous analyses of newspapers and television content suggest that news can be characterized by the amount of context it provides news audiences. This context is important because it can provide people with broader views of the world beyond direct experience. Iyengar (1991) found that television news (especially economic news) can sometimes be thematic, linking together trends and contextualizing events. Newspapers also tend to provide context (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992); over time they have moved away from event-centered journalism toward broader, more interpretive news (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). Mutz (1998) argued that these coverage trends show that news provides audiences with aggregated, national information rather than information that might be more personal in nature, thereby exposing people to broader collective experiences. Where those experiences are both heavily covered in the news and shared by the individual viewer, personal concerns should weigh more heavily in national evaluations. Likewise, the collective and aggregated focus of the news should prime national perceptions.

However, existing content analyses do not demonstrate the extent to which the news focuses on more personalized or psychologically closer portrayals of events. Although previous content analyses are suggestive of how national perceptions might be shaped or primed, they have not been oriented towards personal perceptions. News

content has the capability of drawing attention to both national and personal conditions. I argue that the media can portray economic issues as closer or more distant to an individual's every day concerns. This focus can influence the degree to which personal or national perceptions matter in national evaluations of politics. Although the news is likely to focus more heavily on collective and national problems, the presence of psychologically close information could contribute to priming effects. As a result, although psychologically close presentations of issues may be relatively subtle or rare events, they are substantively interesting, especially if this type of content and priming can shed light on the many theories that deal with simple self-interest.

However, before demonstrating whether the stress on near or distant concerns influences the weight of individuals' considerations in political evaluations, it is important to examine the emphasis that the news actually creates. In other words, how does the news stress near or distant considerations and how often does it emphasize each type of consideration? I argue, and also find, that the news media frequently focus on issues in such a way as to emphasize national level or distant concerns over personal or near ones. Understanding the relative occurrence of near or distant information is a first step in understanding how these concerns subsequently affect public opinion. Therefore, this chapter uses content analysis focusing on the economy to examine the news environment, to see the way in which news frames are actually constructed. Although the phenomenon I discuss in the dissertation should apply across many issues, economic news is an important case. Research suggests that economic news can focus people's attention on the national economy. Likewise, it is probably one of the more aggregated and societally-focused news topics (Iyengar, 1991). However, it also is likely to have



much in common with other news, because news norms and considerations of newsworthiness are important in shaping what news content looks like generally.

Through the content analysis, I will demonstrate that economic news stories use cues, frames, and other message characteristics in terms that reflect the national economy more often than in terms that reflect personal, individual-level concerns.

To examine message characteristics, a content analysis was conducted spanning the years 1999 through 2009, based upon a sample of economic news stories from both *The NBC Nightly News* and *The New York Times*. Overall, this chapter does two things. First, it examines theory and previous research to determine deductively frames and other message characteristics that could be classified based on different types of psychological distance, investigating economic news content for these distance frames. Second, it makes theoretical contributions to the literature by expanding the idea of general frames in content to include types of psychological distance.

### **Why Economic News Content**

Economic news is an important place to examine content characteristics for two reasons. First, the economy often plays a significant role in citizens' candidate evaluations. Second, the scope of previous studies of economic news coverage has been mostly limited to only a few aspects of coverage and could be broadened; studies have examined the tone of coverage (De Boef & Kellstedt, 2004; Fogarty, 2005; Harrington, 1989; Hester & Gibson, 2003; Nadeau, Niemi, Fan, & Amato, 1999; Patterson, 1993; Sanders & Gavin, 2004; Soroka, 2006) and the number of recession headlines (Blood & Phillips, 1995). These studies are important because they are motivated by an interest in

either the accuracy of economic news coverage or in whether economic news coverage outweighs real-world conditions in political evaluations. This research involves linking media portrayals to objective economic indicators (e.g., DeBoef & Kellstedt, 2004; Fogarty 2005; Soroka, 2006) and to individuals' evaluations of the economy (Hester & Gibson, 2003; Blood & Phillips, 1995; Nadeau et al., 1999) or the president (De Boef & Kellstedt, 2004; Nadeau et al., 1999).<sup>3</sup> Examining the negativity of content is important, because it allows researchers to better understand the origins and accuracy of citizens' economic evaluations, as well as its link to democratic accountability. However, understanding economic coverage more broadly could provide further insight into how news shapes political attitudes and opinions.

Economic news is also interesting because the economy appears to be portrayed differently than other types of news. Frames are often shaped strongly by actual events (Bolson, 2011; Shih, Wijaya, & Brossard, 2008) because specific events often serve as the “peg” that provides form to more abstract stories or issues (Patterson, 1998). Although Iyengar (1991) found that some political issues on television are framed this way—focusing more on individual events or actors rather than contextualizing problems—he finds that unemployment tends to be framed thematically, focusing on broader contexts. In fact, Iyengar found unemployment stories had a two to one ratio for focusing on context compared to individual events (i.e., thematic compared to episodic

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<sup>3</sup> Another concern driving the positive negative distinction is with making comparisons within the news of relative amounts of coverage. For example, negative coverage of the economy is more common than positive coverage (Fogarty, 2005; Soroka, 2006). Also, where the tone is compared to objective indicators of the economy, researchers have found that the tone of coverage can depart from indications given by objective measures of the economy, such as unemployment statistics, inflation rates, or interest rates (De Boef & Kellstedt, 2004). Often, the news is more negative than would be expected based on these objective economic indicators. For example, during non-election years negative statistics receive more media attention than positive ones (Harrington, 1989).

frames), over the period 1981 through 1986 (pp. 47-48). A characteristic television story on unemployment, during the recessionary period he captured, was thematically framed, focusing on monthly unemployment statistics, expert interpretation of this data, and the consequences of unemployment for the larger economy.<sup>4</sup> This typical type of unemployment story seems abstract and distant from every day experiences, and is portrayed in an aggregate rather than personalized way. Despite the possibility that the economy is portrayed more in terms of the aggregate, it may also have features in common with other types of coverage because of how economic news—and all news—is shaped by considerations of newsworthiness.

### **Newsworthiness**

All news has certain characteristics in common. These characteristics arise from the news making process, and are heavily influenced by journalists' considerations of what is newsworthy. For example, Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) found that the media use five general frames, which are conflict, moral values, economics, powerlessness, and human impact. These content characteristics arise from the shared values that lead journalists' selection of events to cover (e.g., Gans, 1979) and a shared understanding among journalists of what makes an event newsworthy. Shoemaker & Cohen (2006) argued that news values can be divided into two main dimensions of newsworthiness—deviance and social significance. Deviance is anything that would be considered novel or involves conflict, while social significance is determined by both impact and how important politically, economically, or culturally, an event is (and how public it is).

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<sup>4</sup> However, unlike with other issues, economic news stories are often generated by the release of economic statistics.

Understanding what journalists consider newsworthy allows for a better understanding of how news is presented. One key way in which news is presented is framing.

### **Framing**

Considerations of what is or is not newsworthy are part of the framing process. Framing deals with the specific ways in which the content of a message can be portrayed. Iyengar (1991) argued that the media frame based on “subtle alterations” in the way choices are presented or content is organized. For Gamson and Modigliani (1989) a frame is even more: it is a “central organizing idea . . . for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue,” (p. 3). Entman (1993) proposed that news frames not only define problems for audiences but can also suggest particular interpretations of causes and solutions for these problems. What is clear, however, is that when a journalist constructs a news story, he or she makes decisions about how an issue should be presented, which aspects of an issue should be highlighted and which are of lesser relevance. This journalistic decision-making can extend from small presentational choices to the overall organization and storyline of a news article.

Framing is inherent in news stories and is an outcome of the news-making process. Journalistic norms and news routines influence the way news stories are constructed (Gans, 1979). Framing can also occur because journalists interact with elite actors, such as interest groups and politicians, who seek to advance particular interpretations for problems (e.g., Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). However, one key reason journalists use frames is because they have an imperative to write a story. The complexity of any given event requires journalists to make choices in order to narrow down information (Entman,

2007; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). They have to make order out of a large number of assembled facts, many of which are often conflicting. Journalists report the news in a way that tells a story, and this narrative requirement leads them to use frames. Because they have specific criteria for what is considered newsworthy, they have limited options for creating stories which can result in a limited range of frames for any particular topic, including the economy.

Therefore, there are thought to be two main types of frames: general and issue-specific.<sup>5</sup> While issue-based frames are often thought to be related to elite influence (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007), general frames are likely tied to other processes of story construction, although both can have effects on public opinion. In this study, general frames are most important; the types of frames that are being focused on here—psychological distance—can apply to many types of issues and can be thought of as general features or frames used by the news media as typically applied to story construction.

Other types of information or message characteristics can also be involved in news stories, and can be present in addition to frames. These message characteristics can be subtle, but can also affect public opinion. For example, cues, or pieces of information, can affect opinion (Druckman, Hennessy, Charles, & Webber, 2010). Cues often appear

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<sup>5</sup> There are other names for these types of frames. For example, Borah (2011) used “unique” or “consistent” frames (but see Chong & Druckman, 2007). de Vries, Peter, and Semetko (2001) argued that frames are issue-specific where story structures and terms change depending upon the topic of coverage (i.e., relevant to only one issue), while general frames can be found across different issues and contexts. General frames include episodic-thematic (Iyengar, 1991), responsibility attribution (de Vries, Peter, & Semetko, 2001), conflict (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Patterson, 1993), economic frames, morality frames, and human impact frames (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). On the other hand, issue-specific frames are similar to the types of frames that Gamson and Modigliani (1987) found in their investigation of how affirmative action frames have changed over time. For example, they found a “no preferential treatment” frame and a “remedial action” frame, both of which deal with how the issue of affirmative action has been portrayed but which would not translate well to other issues.

in news stories as labels that define issues or groups, such as partisan labels and race labels (Cho, de Zuniga, Shah, & McLeod, 2006; Mondak, 1993). However, other information can be considered a cue, such as message tone (Petty & Wegener, 1998), endorsements (Druckman et al., 2010), and public opinion (Bartels, 1988). Therefore, message characteristics other than frames should be considered since they can also prime individuals (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002).

### **Distance in News Coverage**

Construal level theory (CLT) argues that people can feel psychologically close or distant to a piece of information (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Distant perceptions will be construed more abstractly, while closer psychological distances will be construed more concretely. Psychological distance is tied mainly to three separate dimensions: time, physical distance, and social distance.<sup>6</sup> Psychological distance could be important to how events or policies are discussed in the news. News reports might end up depicting both political events and policy debates along different dimensions of psychological distance. For example, an event like the release of unemployment data could lend itself to explanations of consequences for both the individual and the collective, in the near term or the future, and it could affect some locales or regions of the country more than others. Moreover, it could be portrayed as affecting many people, a few people or groups, another person or family, or even the reader or viewer of the story. Journalists, who could

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<sup>6</sup> Hypothetical distance is also another dimension. Moreover, although these elements of psychological distance are argued to produce construals of different levels of abstraction and concreteness, in practice differing levels of abstraction have also been used to produce different perceived distances (Nan, 2007).

portray a range of consequences, may choose to highlight distant consequences over near consequences or the other way around.

### **Temporal and Physical Distance**

Research suggests that near term consequences are most likely to be highlighted. The news is consistently biased toward the present because values such as novelty, and the need for an event upon which to build a story, are a strong part of news construction (Patterson, 1998). Patterson argued episodic frames and strategic coverage are both common frames that make the political process appear short-lived. However, over the long-term, research shows, at least for newspapers, that more time points are incorporated into stories because print journalists engage in more interpretative coverage (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997). It may be that the long-term shift in reporting is to cover more time points, but that the balance of current coverage favors a short time frame.<sup>7</sup> For physical distance, Barnhurst and Mutz argued that the news has shifted toward covering more locations. However, it is unclear what the balance of this might look like—national news is likely to report on stories that affect the whole country. Therefore, the research questions and hypotheses guiding this section are:

RQ1: Are distal temporal or physical cues more common than proximal cues?

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<sup>7</sup> Newspapers and television might also have different amounts of present versus long-term time frames.

## **Social Distance: The Individual-Societal Distance Distinction**

Iyengar (1991) used framing to demonstrate that the character of news presentations can affect the way people attribute blame for social problems.<sup>8</sup> He identified two types of frames for problems covered in the news. Individual events and illustrative examples focusing on single cases were identified as “episodic frames,” while broad problems that had context were “thematic frames.” He had two key findings. First, television news is more episodic, focusing more on discrete events and individual cases. Second, those watching episodic stories are more likely to blame the individuals in the stories rather than link the individual cases to national conditions and blame the government. He argued that television news, by focusing on isolated events, leads people to not attribute causes for problems to the government.

However, Iyengar’s (1991) examination of unemployment news led to a different conclusion; unlike several other issues, unemployment was mostly thematic. All unemployment stories in his experiments were linked to societal attributions regardless of whether they were framed episodically or thematically. These unemployment findings lead Iyengar (1991) to suggest that the dominance of thematic framing and societal attributions in unemployment stories could be a reason why sociotropy is common in studies of economic voting. In other words, because economic news frames usually contextualize economic events, people respond to economic news by blaming the government. Iyengar, however, did not test the sociotropic hypothesis because he did not examine individuals’ economic perceptions; he did not look for a relationship between the frames and economic perceptions nor for a relationship between economic

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<sup>8</sup> Iyengar (1991) looked at both causal responsibility, or at who is responsible for creating a problem, and treatment responsibility, or who is responsible for solving a problem.



perceptions and government blame (or evaluations of political figures). Nevertheless, thematic frames dominate unemployment coverage, and it is likely that they are prevalent in other types of economic news coverage. Therefore, I hypothesize that thematic framing will be more common in economic news stories.

H1: Thematic framing will be present at a greater rate than episodic framing in economic news.

Iyengar's (1991) research suggested that people are more likely to be primed with thematic frames because thematic frames implicate the government in problems. The suggestion that thematic coverage and governmental attributions should be linked is important, but what is it about thematic coverage that helps individuals make this link? Thematic coverage in Iyengar's (1991) study often focused on contextualizing a problem (sometimes historically), or linking events together with a theme or long-term point of view. Long time spans or contextualized points of view could help citizens' link problems to government. However, a focus on government or societal level consequences of problems would likely make any potential link stronger. Although a societal level focus is part of the thematic frame, Shah, Kwak, Schmierbach, and Zubric (2004) pointed out that episodic and thematic account for two potentially crosscutting dimensions: a time-span dimension and a social-level dimension. In other words, thematic frames can sometimes portray a long time span, sometimes focus on societal level problems, and sometimes do both. The societal dimension of the thematic frame may be a strong contributory factor to governmental or societal level evaluations. Therefore, examining these dimensions separately, both in content and effects studies, should contribute to a better understanding of both attribution and priming processes.

Likewise, Iyengar's (1991) episodic frames are problematic because they focus on at least two dimensions—either individuals or specific instances or events in the short term. However, either dimension of episodic frames should attenuate blame for societal problems because individuals' points of view should be shifted away from the societal and aggregate nature of a political issue. In fact, Iyengar found that, rather than blaming government, people were more likely to blame the individuals who appeared in news stories framed episodically. Yet, being less likely to blame the government for a problem is not the same as linking your own situation to the government or to an aggregate problem. Episodic frames focus on other people that the audience member does not know; that is, on "some *other* person's personal problem," (Mutz, 1998, p. 103). Framing something episodically is an attempt by journalists to get news viewers to resonate with a single concrete example of somebody else—but the content of episodic frames themselves is not personal.

Iyengar's (1991) episodic frame does not provide a mechanism to explain how personal priming might work because it focuses on other individuals, rather than the self. A news story that focused on the reader or viewer instead, for example, by using second person, might make the link between a personal and political problem stronger. However, it seems unlikely that a self-focused type of individual frame would be used often in the thematic-heavy economic news. Therefore it is hypothesized that:

H2: Societally focused stories will be more prevalent than individually focused stories.

This hypothesis should not only clarify the conceptual vagueness present in thematic stories, it also specifies the type of content that could link individual level stories to perceptions of personal conditions.

## Method

### Sample

To undertake this part of the analysis, I turn to content analysis of the news. I employ *The New York Times* and the *NBC Nightly News* because both have large national audiences.<sup>9</sup> The choice of a newspaper and television program also allows a more detailed look at both print and broadcast news, which likely vary from each other in terms of the sophistication of the audience being addressed, and therefore the complexity of the story. Pruitt, Reilly, and Hoffer (1988) found differences in complexity between television and print economic coverage resulting in effects on economic attitudes; CBS news covered changes in unemployment statistics using shorter stories than print news, and participants who watched the CBS news clips were more pessimistic about future economic conditions than were participants who read newspaper stories.

Additionally, most people report getting their news from television than any other source (Pew Center, 2011). Television news likely reaches people who may not usually be interested in economic stories, thus a portion of the audience could be incidentally exposed to economic news. In terms of print, other news outlets often use stories written by *The New York Times* as the basis for their own stories or directly from the wire

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<sup>9</sup> Streaming video of every NBC broadcast from 1968 is available at no cost from Vanderbilt Television News Archives. Because Vanderbilt only archives television news stories, *The New York Times* stories from the same period were drawn from the Lexis Nexis database.

services. This allows the articles to be used by smaller regional papers, and thus readers not normally accessing these sources may see the stories. *The New York Times* may also set the agenda for the national network news for some topics (Golan, 2006; Reese & Danielian, 1989). Moreover, policy makers, political elites, and other journalists read *The New York Times*. However, newspaper readership has been declining in the general population (Pew Center, 2011).

### **Sampling Procedure**

The units of analysis for the study are individual news stories about the American economy. A total of 785 articles—401 from *The New York Times* and 384 from the *NBC Nightly News*—were sampled over two periods of recession and two periods of expansion in the period from 1999 through 2009.<sup>10</sup> *NBC Nightly News* stories were sampled from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive database while the Lexis Nexis database was used to sample *The New York Times* stories. To sample the individual broadcasts or articles, keyword searches were used. The keywords used were based on typical economic indicators, such as “unemployment (employment),” “inflation,” “GDP,” “consumer spending (consumer price index),” and “interest rates.” The terms were also derived based on previous research (Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002) and additional terms relating to the economy were added.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The periods from March 2001 to November 2001 and December 2007 to June 2009 are considered recessions (Hall et al., 2010) because these dates define periods when, according to the definition of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), there was, “a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales. A recession begins just after the economy reaches a peak of activity and ends as the economy reaches its trough,” (Hall et al. 2003).

<sup>11</sup> The following search terms were entered into the Vanderbilt Television News Archive database: “dow jones” OR “consumer spending” OR “consumer price index” OR “interest rate\*” OR gdp OR econom\* OR

This was a stratified sample, where *The New York Times* and *The NBC Nightly News* were separate strata. For both strata, after the key word search returned the relevant articles, the sampling frame was purged of irrelevant stories.<sup>12</sup> Next, within each stratum, the eleven year period was divided into quarter-years, and stories were randomly drawn from within each quarter based on the proportion of stories within each stratum.

## Variables

Variables for this study fall into two distinct categories. The first category deals with mentions of the president and government and the second deals with psychological distance in CLT.

### **Presidential and Governmental Evaluations.**

*President.* For this variable, a mention of the president in a story was coded as being either present or absent. Mention of the president in an economic news story could

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employ\* OR unemploy\* OR inflation\* OR jobless\* OR jobs OR pocketbook OR prosperity OR recession OR stock market OR wage OR bank\* OR credit\* OR housing OR mortgage\* OR deflation\* OR consumer\* OR spending OR debt OR bailout OR tarp OR income OR expansion OR prices OR bankrupt\* OR foreclos\*. The stars indicate that additional letters were permitted and the quotations indicate that phrases were searched. *The New York Times* search was restricted to the same key words as above, but this time the search was narrowed to terms appearing in headlines from section A, limited to the national desk. The following search terms were entered into the Lexis Nexis database: HEADLINE(dow jones) OR HEADLINE(consumer spending) OR HEADLINE(consumer price index) OR HEADLINE(interest rate\*) OR HEADLINE(gdp) OR HEADLINE(econom\*) OR HEADLINE(employ\*) OR HEADLINE(unemploy\*) OR HEADLINE(inflation\*) OR HEADLINE(jobless\*) OR HEADLINE(jobs) OR HEADLINE(pocketbook) OR HEADLINE(prosperity) OR HEADLINE(recession) OR HEADLINE(stock market) OR HEADLINE(wage) OR HEADLINE(bank\*) OR HEADLINE(credit\*) OR HEADLINE(housing) OR HEADLINE(mortgage\*) OR HEADLINE(deflation\*) OR HEADLINE(consumer\*) OR HEADLINE(debt) OR HEADLINE(bailout) OR HEADLINE(tarp) OR HEADLINE(income) OR HEADLINE(expansion) OR HEADLINE(prices) OR HEADLINE(gdp) OR HEADLINE(bankrupt\*) OR HEADLINE(foreclos\*) and SECTION(A) and "national desk"

<sup>12</sup> Irrelevant stories were broadcast stories shorter than 10 seconds, any stories that were about the economies of other countries or that were about globalization, and search results that included the key terms but were nevertheless irrelevant, such as the term “jobs” returning stories about Steve Jobs.

help people link a particular economic perception to the president, or potentially lead to negative presidential evaluations in the cases where stories are negative.

*Presidential, Government, and Policy Blame Attribution.* For blame attribution, coders were trained to look for whether the news story placed blame for a problem on the president, government, or policies. For these three potential targets of blame, coders chose from two categories—present or absent.

### **Construal Level Theory.**

*Social Distance.* Several variables representing social distance were coded. Coders coded for the presence or absence of references to the middle class, the wealthy, Wall Street, and Main Street. References to public opinion were coded as being present or absent in a story. This could include public opinion data, references to what Americans think, and references to the term “public opinion.” In addition, scope was coded. Scope dealt with how many people could be affected by the issue covered in a story, which was affecting many, some, or a few. The presence or absence of the word “you” in a story (second person) was also coded, which could include either “you” as used by a journalist or “you” as used by the sources being quoted for a story. Finally, the last social distance variable that was coded was based upon Iyengar’s (1991) characterization of episodic and thematic. For the *NBC* sample, each news story was coded as either primarily episodic or thematic. On the other hand, for *The New York Times* sample, each story was coded for whether thematic content was present or absent. The coding of this variable changed between strata because the reliability appeared low in the *NBC* sample. However, changing the coding did not appear to improve the reliability. It should also be noted that although the episodic-thematic distinction is being considered part of social distance, it is

only the thematic part of the coverage that overlaps with social distance; episodic coverage can be about individuals, but not necessarily be considered near or close social distance—just because a story is about an individual person does not necessarily make it feel any closer to audience members who would not likely know that individual personally.

*Temporal Distance.* This was a single variable that coded whether a story focused on the past and present, the near future, or the distant future. The present is psychologically the most proximal, while the past and future should appear more distal.

*Physical Distance.* The location where the majority of a story takes place was coded. This could be local, regional, or national. A news story could be proximal where it discusses an event close to a news reader's physical location. News events that take place in an audience member's hometown or state would be more proximal than an event occurring at the national level. However, with national news, like the *NBC Nightly News*, national stories are likely to appear more distal than local or regional stories, except if the news viewer happened to be in the area on which a news story focused or if the news event had some other sort of personal relevance or distance attribute that made it seem proximal.

*Abstractness/Complexity.* Several variables representing complexity were coded. These included the number of words and paragraphs in a story for *The New York Times* as well as the length of a clip for *NBC News*. Also coded were anecdotes and person on the street quotes, which were both coded as present or absent. Journalists use these to simplify or illustrate more complex stories by focusing on a specific case (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994).

The content variables described above are relevant because each should be able to increase or decrease the salience of personal and national perceptions in national evaluations.

### **Coding Procedures**

Coding of the news stories took place in two parts. First, *NBC Nightly News* coverage was examined starting in the Fall of 2009, while articles from *The New York Times* were investigated beginning in the Fall of 2010. Six undergraduate research assistants were selected to code news stories for this project, for a total of 785 news stories. A total of seven students assisted with the project.<sup>13</sup>

For both rounds of coding, training material consisted of news stories from outside of the period of inquiry, from the ten years prior to the data in the analysis. For *The New York Times*, training material also included stories from after the time frame of the study. Coders were first shown several news clips or news articles and went through the codebook together, discussing each variable in turn. Coders then attempted to code several stories on their own and met collectively to review all of the variables for each story that was coded. Next, the students coded stories on their own and then met to discuss problems with certain stories or variables. As a result several variables were adjusted for clarification and to improve inter-coder reliability. This process was repeated until coding reached 80% or better agreement on all variables. For *The New York Times* articles, a separate codebook and codesheet were provided to coders. The codebook was a

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<sup>13</sup> Another undergraduate volunteered to assist with the content analysis during the summer of 2010. This student was trained to help clean the data, as well as create a database of stories for *The New York Times* sample in order to facilitate the coding that would take place in the Fall semester, 2010.



hard copy list of the variables along with definitions and instructions about each of the variables. Coders entered their coding into an Excel codesheet. For the *NBC Nightly News*, the codebook and codesheet were integrated, and appeared as if they were survey questions using Qualtrics software. Where articles were double or triple coded, I entered the coding from the coder who appeared to be most reliable across the variables into the final dataset.

### **Reliability**

For both *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News*, reliability coding proceeded the same way. Once the pilot of practice stories was finished and the coding of the final sample was underway, all three of the coders received an identical set of stories selected from the final sample which they coded separately.<sup>14</sup> For each of the variables, reliability was determined two ways. First, Krippendorff's alpha coefficients were generated using an SPSS macro, following Hayes and Krippendorff's (2007) algorithm for determining alpha. Second, percent agreement totals were generated using Neuendorf's PRAM program or by hand (Neuendorf, 2002; Skymeg Software, 2009).

Both methods of reliability assessment have advantages and limitations, and as a result researchers suggest that multiple measures of reliability should be reported (e.g., Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The advantages and limitations of each deserve discussion here because measures like Krippendorff's alpha that correct for chance agreement have been criticized in the case of extreme distributions or rare events

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<sup>14</sup> For *The New York Times* sample, students were given a subsample of 70 articles, or 17.5% of the sample to each code on their own for reliability purposes. For *NBC Nightly News*, students were given 16% of the sample to code for reliability, although one student coded fewer stories for reliability, ending up with 13% of the sample. Selecting 10-20% of the sample for reliability is common practice (Neuendorf, 2010).

as being overly conservative (e.g., Neuendorf, 2002; Neuendorf, 2010; Perreault & Leigh, 1989; Dixon & Linz, 2000)—a problem that would also apply for several variables in this dataset. Krippendorff's alpha has an advantage over percent agreement because it takes into account multiple coders, levels of measurement, and chance agreement ( it corrects for chance agreements and also takes into account the size of the misses based on the level of measurement) (Krippendorff, 2004). However, Krippendorff's alpha's disadvantage is that it overcorrects reliability coefficients under circumstances in which there is a rare event (Neuendorf, 2010). Rare events occur when the presence (or absence) of a category occurs very frequently, resulting in low variance. As Neuendorf (2010) points out, coefficients are more likely to achieve acceptable reliability when there is a "reasonable amount of variance" (p. 285). Percent agreement is better at assessing dichotomous nominal data with two coders because as the number of categories increases, high percent agreement becomes difficult to obtain.<sup>15</sup> Percent agreement is less desirable because it does not correct for chance agreement (Krippendorff, 2004). Nevertheless, it does show how much raw agreement there is between coders and may be useful as an alternate measure in cases where variance is low. Therefore, both percent agreement and Krippendorff's alpha are provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 shows reliability coefficients for variables in both *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News* datasets. Students were able to determine the topic of the article for television news stories fairly reliably with an alpha of .72, although for newspaper stories only an alpha of .58 was achieved. Although this does not meet standard levels of

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<sup>15</sup> Krippendorff (2004) argues that percent agreement is not ideal for levels of measurement beyond nominal since it cannot account for the additional information provided by higher levels of measurement. However, it can still be calculated for other levels of measurement, as show in Table 2.2. Additionally I calculate percent agreement for three coders by averaging the percent agreements of the pairs.

reliability, an informal discussion of the reliability of this measure led to the consensus that *The New York Times* articles often discussed multiple topics or discussed a single topic in ways that overlapped with more than one topic category and determining the main emphasis of the article could be difficult. Valence only has moderate reliability in both datasets indicating that students may have had trouble determining whether a story was positive or negative (for television) or the relative amount of positive and negative coverage a story contained (for newspapers). Table 2.1 also shows that, for the blame variables, only blame for the president in the televisions dataset was able to be reliably coded based on Krippendorff's alpha.<sup>16</sup> None of the other two blame variables achieved high reliability. However, blaming policy could be classified as rare events since it was not often present in the data. This resulted in high percent agreements but low Krippendorff's alphas (as seen in Table 2.1).

For the other group of variables, the following also had low variance: numeric data, public opinion, main street, middle class, wealthy, second person, and past/present (for newspapers) which could explain the low Krippendorff's alpha coefficients. Length, anecdotes, mentions of the president, mentions of Wall Street, location, and person quoted (for television) all appeared to be at least moderately reliable. However, coders were not able to determine thematic frames reliably, so results should be interpreted with caution. It is perhaps not surprising that high reliability was not able to be achieved for the thematic variables, because of the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes as thematic, given thematic frames are actually multidimensional constructs (Shah et al.,

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<sup>16</sup> Neuendorf (2010) points out that there is disagreement in the literature about acceptable levels of reliability for coefficients that correct for chance agreement. Krippendorff (2004) argues that tentative conclusions can be made for alpha coefficients  $\geq .667$ , although  $\geq .80$  should be the standard for reliability.

2004). Iyengar (1991) also points out that frames are almost never completely episodic or completely thematic, but rather tend have elements of both. This could also explain why coders had difficulty with the thematic variables.

Table 2.1 Reliability for Television and Newspaper Datasets Using Percent Agreement and Krippendorff's alpha

Variable	Television		Newspapers	
	% agree	K alpha	% agree	K alpha
Topic	.77	.72	.70	.58
Valence	.67	.51	NA	NA
No. Positive Paragraphs	NA	NA	.36	.23
No. Negative Paragraphs	NA	NA	.18	.24
Length	.98	1.00	.92	.93
Time frame	.68	.09†	NA	NA
Past/Present	NA	NA	.98	-.00†
Near Future	NA	NA	.67	.35
Distant Future	NA	NA	.65	.26
Thematic <sup>a</sup>	.62	.16	.72	.17
Anecdote	.88	.69	.91	.66
President	.95	.89	.91	.78
Numeric	.89	-.05†	NA	NA
Public opinion	.87	.48	.82	.12†
Wall street	.82	.65	.96	.74
Main street	.99	.00†	.99	.00†
Middle class	.98	-.02†	.91	.51
Wealthy	.98	.39	.91	.14†
Location	.90	.61	.73	.65
Scope	.80	.29	.50	.31
Second person	.92	.33	.58	-.10†
Person quoted	.96	.90	.76	.35
<i>Blame Variables</i>				
Blame president	.86	.70	.73	.14†
Blame government	.80	.27	.80	.27
Blame policy	.89	.13†	.91	.06†

Notes. For Krippendorff's alpha, † indicates  $>.05$ . All other coefficients are  $<.05$ .

NV indicates that no variance was present in the coding of a variable and a coefficient could not be computed. NA indicates that a variable was not coded in a particular dataset.

a. These were coded differently for the two datasets; in the television dataset, coders decided whether the news story was more episodic, thematic, or gave even attention to both elements. In the newspaper dataset, coders coded for the presence or absence of thematic content.

Overall, however, the low reliability scores as indicated by Krippendorff's alpha are not surprising and in most cases can be attributed to the prominence of rare events in the data. The argument that more collective and aggregate types of news should be present much more often is suggested by the reliability scores as well.

## **Results**

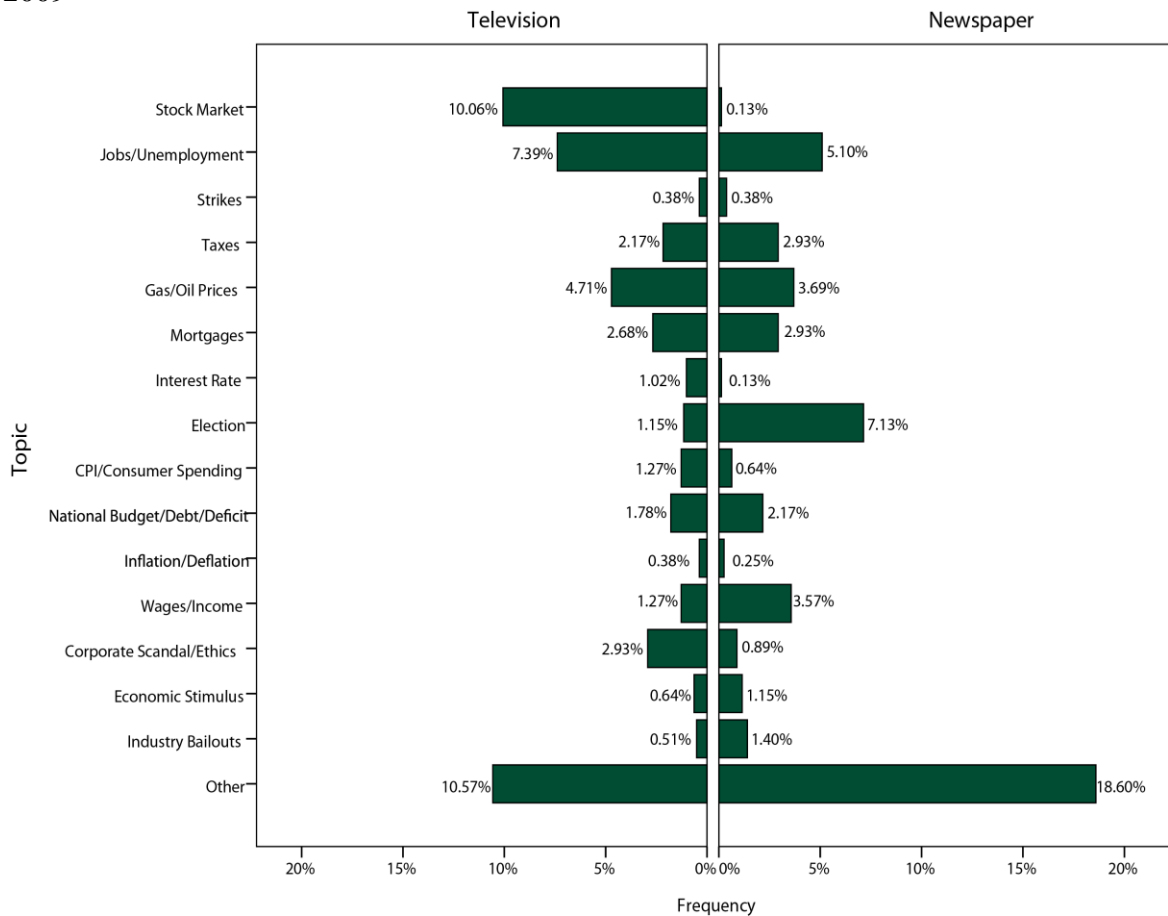
To examine the hypotheses and research question, television and newspaper results are presented separately. There are differences between considerations of newsworthiness for television and newspapers which have resulted in different effects in previous studies. For example, Sotirovic (2003) found that unlike newspapers, television use was associated with individual level explanations for crime, suggesting that television news is more episodic while newspapers are more thematic. Neuman, Just, and Crigler's (1992) study provides some additional support for this notion. They compared newspaper and television content and found that newspaper stories were longer while television stories supplied more visuals and human interest content. News audiences also found that newspapers contextualized facts more but that television stories felt more personally relevant. These results also suggest that there will be differences between television and newspapers on some of the dimensions and variables under investigation in the content analysis. Because these have been identified as important for the type of information that primes personal and national considerations, it is useful to examine the two types of content separately.

To get a better sense of the dataset, a descriptive overview of the topics included in the sample was conducted. Coders classified each economic news story in the sample

for its primary topical focus. Figure 2.1 shows the frequency of topics covered in the sample by *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News*. The left hand panel of Figure 2.1 shows the frequencies of each topic for *NBC Nightly News* and the right hand panel of Figure 2.1 shows the frequencies of each topic for *The New York Times*. For television news, the four most frequently covered topics were the stock market, jobs and unemployment, oil and gas prices, and miscellaneous topics (the category marked “other”) while newspaper stories covered elections, jobs and unemployment, oil and gas prices, and miscellaneous topics (“other”) the most.

Next, it was hypothesized that thematic framing would be present at a greater rate than episodic framing (H1). The frequencies of each of the different psychological distance variables were examined and are shown in Table 2.2. Indeed, results from Table 2.2 indicate that thematic framing is present at a greater rate than episodic framing. In the *NBC Nightly News*, stories were framed thematically 66.9% of the time and episodically 33.1% of the time. For *The New York Times*, thematic content was present in 79.1% of stories, and absent in 20.9% of stories. This is consistent with Iyengar’s (1991) findings; economic news tends to be framed thematically as opposed to episodically.

Figure 2.1 Frequency of Economic Topics on Television and in the Newspaper, 1999-2009



Note. For *The New York Times*, N=401 and for *NBC Nightly News*, N=384.

*Social Distance.* To investigate H2, that societal stories would be present more often than individual stories, several analyses were conducted. First, frequencies were taken for the three blame variables. Table 2.2 shows the number of stories for which a particular entity was blamed (n) and the percentage of stories where blame was present

(%) for both *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News*. The data show that blame is placed most often on the government followed by the president. Policies are blamed less frequently for stories. Although *The New York Times* appears to blame government more often than *NBC Nightly News* does, this difference is only marginally significant,  $\phi=.07$ ,  $p<.07$ . All three of these variables represent the societal level.

In terms of Wall Street, Main Street, middle class, and wealthy, *NBC Nightly News* appeared to be more distancing than *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* referred to the middle class more than these other groups, although discussions of the wealthy followed closely. However, *NBC Nightly News* discussed Wall Street more than these other entities.<sup>17</sup> The scope for both news outlets was focused on stories that affect many people more often than focusing on a narrower scope.<sup>18</sup> In terms of the second person, or the use of “you,” neither *The New York Times* or *NBC Nightly News* used this very often, with 21.9% and 6.3% respectively, although again this finding could be taken to indicate that *NBC News* stories appeared more distancing. Taken together, these findings show that these outlets tended to be more distally focused.

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<sup>17</sup> The trend appears to be slightly more reversed where public opinion is concerned; public opinion appeared in more (10.2%) of *The New York Times* stories than *NBC* stories (8.1%). Public opinion shows one of the most concrete examples of how a collective can be portrayed; however, the absence of public opinion in a news story does not show that a story should feel more psychologically proximal.

<sup>18</sup> In this case, one could make the argument however, that affecting many could be more likely to include the reader, while stories only affecting some or a few would be less likely to affect the reader. *NBC Nightly News* was significantly more likely to focus on stories where many people would be affected than *The New York Times*,  $\tau\text{-}b=.32$ ,  $p<.0001$ , which could mean that the scope of *The New York Times* was actually more distant than *NBC Nightly News*.



Table 2.2 Frequencies for Psychological Distance Cues in *The New York Times* and the *NBC Nightly News*

	<i>New York Times</i>		<i>NBC Nightly News</i>	
	n	%	n	%
<i>Valence</i>				
Mostly positive	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	69	18.0
Mostly negative	<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>	231	60.2
<i>Time frame<sup>b</sup></i>				
Past/present	399	99.5	323	84.1
Near future	260	64.8	49	12.8
Distant future	143	35.7	7	1.8
<i>Location</i>				
Local	90	22.4	32	8.3
Regional	22	5.5	6	1.6
National	257	64.1	336	87.5
<i>Scope</i>				
Affecting many	194	48.4	296	77.1
Affecting some	66	16.5	58	15.1
Affecting a few	141	35.2	30	7.8
Thematic <sup>c</sup>	317	79.1	257	66.9
Anecdote	58	14.5	104	27.1
President	205	51.1	90	23.4
Numeric	--	--	363	94.5
Public opinion	41	10.2	31	8.1
Wall street	25	6.2	148	38.5
Main street	6	1.5	6	1.6
Middle class	47	11.7	19	4.9
Wealthy	43	10.7	9	2.3
Second person	88	21.9	24	6.3
Person quoted	55	13.7	161	41.9
Blame president	46	11.5	32	8.3
Blame government	59	14.7	40	10.4
Blame policy	26	6.5	17	4.4

Notes. For *The New York Times*, N=401 and for *NBC Nightly News*, N=384.

a. *The New York Times* had a mean percent of positive paragraphs M=.079 (SD=.152) and a mean percent of negative paragraphs of M=.189 (SD=.230).

b. For time frame, *The New York Times* stories were coded as separate variables with each variable either present or absent, while *NBC Nightly News* stories used a single variable where the story was characterized as falling under only one type of time frame.

c. In *The New York Times* dataset, thematic represents whether there was any thematic content present. In the *NBC Nightly News*, coders chose between episodic and thematic for each story; therefore, thematic represents whether the frame for a story was more thematic than episodic. *The New York Times* dataset did not code for the presence of episodic content.

*Temporal Distance.* Both *The New York Times* and *NBC News* focus more on the present or past than they do on the future, which answers part of RQ1. Because the present is psychologically the most proximal, while the future should appear more distal, on this dimension, both types of news were more proximal. However, although *The New York Times* mentioned the present or past in almost all stories (99.5%), they also mentioned the near future relatively often (64.8%). This contrasts with *NBC Nightly News*, where the past or present dominated the focus at 84.1% compared to the near future at 12.8%. This is unsurprising because past research indicated that news audiences thought that newspapers provided more context than television stories (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992), which would be consistent with providing more discussion of an issue at multiple time points.

*Physical Distance.* Both news outlets focused on national stories more often than stories on local (or regional) settings (RQ1), which is unsurprising given the national audience of both outlets. This also indicates that, since stories should feel more proximal the closer they are to the audience members' physical locations, both outlets are focused on more physically distant stories. Additionally, focusing on a local event does not mean that the local event feels physically proximal to an audience member since local events depicted in national news outlets are not likely to be situated in a close physical location to the respondent—only an audience member's local news outlets should be able to generate the closest feelings of physical distance.

*Abstractness/Complexity.* Length is not shown in Table 2.2. For *The New York Times*, stories had a mean length of  $M= 819.2$  words ( $SD=427.6$ ). For *NBC Nightly News*, stories had a mean length of  $M= 2:05$  minutes ( $SD =1:25$ ). Words were not counted for

*NBC Nightly News* stories, but Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) found that average newspaper articles had twice as many words as average television stories. Although it was not collected for *The New York Times*, the present content analysis indicates that numeric data were used in almost all (94.5%) of *NBC Nightly News* stories. People on the street were quoted in *NBC Nightly News* more often (41.9% of stories) than *The New York Times* (13.7% of stories). Anecdotes were also more commonly used in *NBC Nightly News* stories (27.1% of stories used anecdotes) than *The New York Times* stories (14.5% of stories). Both person on the street quotes and anecdotes are often used to make news issues or events appear less complex (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994), and *NBC News* employs both techniques more often. These findings indicate that television news may be perceived as less complex than newspaper news. Other researchers have shown that audiences tend to find television to be more entertaining, with visuals and a narrative structure that are easier to follow than print (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992), which could also contribute to less complexity or abstractness for television relative to newspapers. However, it is likely that economic news stories, regardless of medium, are still complex because they rely on numeric data and tend to be thematic, as discussed above.

Finally, to illustrate some of the ways in which the news appears to be collectively focused, I pulled examples of text from several stories in my sample that were about inflation and health care—the focus of the next two chapters. Table 2.3 shows three ways that the news portrays collective-level information, referring to “Americans” as a group, as a collective of other individuals, and as statistics. For example, in *The New York Times* stratum, 95% of stories used numeric data. The table shows how the news uses statistics to contextualize trends and represent the collective (or large parts of the

collective). Both newspapers and television stories about the economy use this collective level of information, which is consistent with other research and shows the nature of the way in which news is collective and nationally focused.

Table 2.3 Examples of Text from News Stories on Inflation and Health Care Demonstrating Collective Level Information.

Style of Aggregation	Inflation Stories	Health Care Stories
Reference to America as a single collective or national-level entity	<p>NY Times, 6/4/2001 The chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Alan Greenspan said today that inflation was "not a significant problem" in <b>the American economy</b>, but he stressed that the Fed was keeping a close watch for signs of potential inflationary pressures.</p> <p>NBC, 10/14/2005 It's about to be felt in <b>every American home</b> if it hasn't already. . . While <b>Americans</b> are pouring more money into their gas tanks every month it is also true that across the economy inflation is relatively tame.</p>	<p>NY Times, 4/24/2003 Representative Richard A. Gephardt, the Missouri Democrat who is running for president, proposed repealing planned federal tax cuts to provide insurance to all Americans.</p>
Use of statistics or quantities to represent aggregates	<p>NY Times, 6/4/2001: "All evidence still supports a fairly solid level of productivity," he said, adding that the level would be markedly above <b>the average annual 1.5 percent rate the United States experienced</b> during the 20 years before 1995.</p> <p>NBC, 6/15/2004 The government's <b>consumer price index which measures inflation rose 6/10ths of a percent</b> in May alone mostly because of rising energy prices. That's the fastest rate in more than three years . . . 30% of companies expect to hire new workers in the next three months.</p>	<p>NY Times, 03/27/2001 <b>Sixty-three percent of Americans</b> get health insurance through an employer.</p> <p>NY Times, 11/11/2001: She was referring to the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, the 1986 law intended to provide a bridge for workers between jobs. It has been <b>used by millions</b> of workers, but it has major holes.</p> <p>NBC, 8/28/2007 The number of Americans without health insurance has gone up from nearly <b>45 million in 2005 to nearly 47 million Americans</b> last year.</p>

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References to others as a collective of individuals	<p>NBC, 10/14/2005 Higher energy prices are having an impact on consumer confidence driving it lower. And that means that future spending on the part of <b>consumers, what they buy</b> at the stores, is potentially at risk . . . The cost of living jumped so quickly the government today announced that <b>social security recipients</b> will get the biggest monthly boost in fifteen years come January . . . Although <b>they're</b> getting an increase in their social security check <b>they</b> are not going to be able to buy more.</p>	<p>NY Times, 11/11/2001: <b>"The vast majority of the public</b> doesn't understand the problems associated with Cobra," said Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, a liberal advocacy group. "Cobra provides a very crucial right for recently laid off people, but it is unaffordable for the intended beneficiaries to exercise that right."</p> <p>NY Times, 11/11/2001: Robert J. Blendon, an expert at Harvard on public opinion and health, predicted: "It will take a little while, and then I think we'll see this issue re-emerge. Like '92, we have premiums going up, <b>people losing jobs, people losing health insurance</b> who traditionally thought <b>they</b> had it, <b>and people finding no real safety</b> net of coverage."</p> <p>NBC, 4/28/2003 What can <b>consumers</b> do? Using preferred providers guarantees no surprises; they've agreed with the insurer on price . . . This is absolutely byzantine information that the <b>consumer</b> is supposed to navigate.</p>
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### Discussion

Findings indicate that both *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News* tend to be more focused on psychologically distant portrayals of the economy than psychologically proximal ones. Measurements for three of the four dimensions of psychological distance—complexity, social distance, and physical distance—appeared to support this notion of distant portrayals. On the other hand, economic news in both *The New York Times* and *NBC Nightly News* tended to focus more on the present than the future, which tends to be perceived as psychologically closer. Focusing on the present is a consistent bias in news framing (Patterson, 1998), so it is unsurprising to find it is also the case for economic news. Additionally, findings show that thematic framing was more common

than episodic framing, which is consistent with Iyengar's (1991) examination of economic news content.

One surprising finding that should be highlighted is that *NBC Nightly News* coverage differed in its use of second person, a measure of social distance, compared to *The New York Times*. *NBC* was actually more distant in its use of second person than *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* was much more likely to use "you" and address the reader directly than *NBC Nightly News*,  $\tau\text{-}b=.22$ ,  $p<.0001$ .<sup>19</sup> This use of second person implies that in some cases, *The New York Times* uses closer social distances than *NBC Nightly News*. However, neither *The New York Times* nor *NBC Nightly News* used second person very often, with 21.9% and 6.3% of stories using second person respectively. It still seems that, by and large, the news tends to employ distance frames on the social distance dimension.

One limitation of this content analysis is that the television news sample did not differentiate between business stories and economic stories. On the other hand, although *The New York Times* sample did not differentiate between business and economy stories either, stories were only selected from section A and not selected from the business section of the paper. The consequences of this may mean that there are more business stories in the *NBC Nightly News* sample than *The New York Times* sample. Different sections of the newspaper or newscasts might have slightly different treatments of issues—for example business news could be more thematic than episodic or vice versa.

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<sup>19</sup> It seems unlikely, although possible, that *The New York Times* journalists would directly address the readers. However, quotations are likely to address the reader and so this discrepancy could be caused by the use of quotations. Although the journalists are not likely seeking quotes that use second person, it could be possible that *The New York Times* uses more quotations than *NBC Nightly News* and second person is more likely to be used in these quotations.

Moreover, where a story is placed could result in different treatments as well: television stories that appear first versus later in a broadcast could focus on the present as opposed to the future, for example. These distinctions in placement or section should be explored further in future research.

Additionally, since content that potentially produces a focus on the self or the collective is not limited to economic news, the variables investigated in this study could be examined for other issues in the news, such as the environment or health care. This chapter suggested that psychological distance frames and blame frames were general frames that could apply across issues. Likewise, individuals should have similar responses to these frames across many issues. It would be useful to find out whether other issues present these frames with the same frequencies as economic news. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to find out whether other issues are more likely to be presented as psychologically proximal as opposed to the bias towards distal framing found for economic news. For example, Iyengar (1991) found that whether an issue in the news tends to be treated as primarily thematic or episodic varies depending on the issue at hand. This could be true for dimensions of distance as well.

A final limitation of this content analysis is that it focused on sources of national news, while local news may also be important. Local news should be more likely than national news to show events that take place within closer physical proximity to the individual than national news sources, and it could also be likely that local news focuses on policy consequences or economic consequences at proximal physical distances as well. However, trends in local news show that coverage may not be very local. For example, although city newspapers were interested in having “hyperlocal” coverage that would

focus on neighborhoods and communities as they transitioned to online formats, most of these initiatives did not happen (Edmonds, Guskin, & Rosenstiel, 2011). Moreover, print circulation for newspapers has been declining and also fell in 2010. Therefore, it is unclear to what degree local news coverage is proximal, and based on trends in news economics, it is unclear how much local coverage news consumers can access or receive. However, future investigations could examine how local news covers the economy.

Yet, despite these limitations, this content analysis shows that national news primarily portrays the economy with psychologically distal frames, with the exception of temporal distance, which tends to be portrayed as psychologically close. This leads to the question of how these frames affect the salience of the self or the collective in citizens' political evaluations. However, to understand the effects of these distance frames in the news on the public, I turn to experiments in the next two chapters.



### Chapter 3 Priming in Inflation News

In her book, *Impersonal Influence*, Mutz (1998) argued that a primary influence of the media is to facilitate collective thinking. The media can also link personal experience and concerns to political evaluations during periods of heavy issue coverage. Her attempt to connect trends related to the rise of interpretive journalism to the increasing availability of collective portrayals of social and political issues is a starting point for understanding how collective experiences depicted in the media might lead to societal level thinking about social and political issues. However, exposure to collective experiences is not the only way in which societal thinking may be activated. The content analysis in Chapter 2 showed that the news depicted events and analyses of issues using distancing techniques and frames. It did so across several dimensions, including social distance, physical distance, and complexity. However, one dimension of distance was frequently portrayed as being proximal: temporal distance. These findings imply that the media do play a role in keeping politics at a remove from everyday life, but also suggests situations where news coverage may facilitate a different kind of thinking. However, to demonstrate whether distance frames in news coverage can make the self or collective more salient, priming the way in which the president and policies are evaluated, I use experiments.

Most of the work to date involving personal and national perceptions in political attitudes has been investigated using public opinion surveys (e.g., Heatherington, 1996;

Sears & Funk, 1991; Mutz, 1998). Experimental research on the topic has by and large not dealt with media messages, nor does it deal explicitly with media framing or priming (e.g, Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001). However, priming studies show that messages outside of the news media context can prime self-interest or national perceptions in policy attitudes (Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001; Hunt, Kim, Borgida, & Chaiken, 2010). Additionally, priming studies dealing with political messages have started to show how message characteristics can increase the strength of the relationship between attitudes and candidate support (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002) and attitudes and candidate evaluations (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998). Althaus and Kim (2006) argued that news priming scholarship has often examined priming as though it was a “big message” effect by investigating the salience of a topic or issue on the agenda, but that it would be wrong to assume that message characteristics were not responsible for priming effects in more natural settings. Mutz’s (1992) arguments about priming have come close to making distinctions about the ability of particular types of content to prime citizens; she argued that unemployment news focuses on collective experiences or national conditions which should make national perceptions of unemployment stronger in presidential evaluations (Mutz, 1994). On the other hand, she found that heavy unemployment coverage could prime both personal and national perceptions under certain conditions. As a result, this research area does not provide much theoretical basis for the type of message characteristics that could prime perceptions of the self and nation in political attitudes. Although construal level theory (CLT) lends itself to making some of these theoretical predictions, it is not a theory of media effects and does not manipulate media messages. The experiment in this chapter, however, manipulates the focus of news about

the economy by altering two of the dimensions of psychological distance identified in the content analysis chapter.

Specifically, this experiment uses a national sample of subjects and involves the manipulation of both social distance and temporal distance. The news story stimulus is about how the rising prices of food and clothing play into concerns about inflation as well as the consequences that inflation could have on savings and the cost of goods. The design of the experiment is an incomplete between-subjects factorial design, where there is a control group and a fully crossed 2 x 2 (Social Distance [personal, societal] x Temporal Distance [near future, distant future]) design. In other words, there were 5 groups in total. Participants were first exposed to the news story and then completed questions relating to their opinions on fiscal policy, their attitudes about the president, and their personal and collective perceptions of inflation and rising prices. Although the design of the manipulations lends itself to hypothesizing about crossed factors, the hypotheses in these chapters do not deal with a crossed design, but focus on social and temporal distance separately.

As discussed earlier, exposure to proximal or distal dimensions of an issue were expected to make personal perceptions more or less salient in participants' national level evaluations of government. Specifically, information that appears psychologically close should activate more personal level thinking. Information appearing psychologically distant should trigger more abstract societal level thinking. Therefore, the study in this chapter examines whether messages that take on closer social and temporal distance can make the link between personal perceptions and political opinions stronger than they

would otherwise be—either in absence of such a treatment or in comparison to messages that appear more distant.

H1a. There will be a stronger relationship between personal perceptions and presidential performance attitudes and governmental support attitudes among those who receive either the individual frame or near future frame than those who receive either the distal frame or the control article.

H1b. There will be a stronger relationship between national perceptions and presidential performance attitudes and governmental support attitudes among those who receive either the societal frame or distant future frame than those who receive either the proximal frames or the control article.

Additionally, real-world cues have been hypothesized to play an important role in the relationship between news media use and political evaluations (e.g., Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Mutz, 1998). Mutz found that for those low in media consumption, real-world cues (unemployment experience) factored into more negative evaluations of the president during heavy periods of unemployment coverage. Real-world cues or “personal relevance” have also moderated agenda-setting for issues such as civil rights and social security (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Likewise, real-world experience can strengthen the relationship between attitudes and policy support (Crano, 1997). Therefore, this study examines whether there are differences in the priming effect among groups whose real-world experience would make the issue particularly significant. In this study, I have identified several possible issues, including personal experience with unemployment, personal experience with the issue of inflation, and income. Personal experience with unemployment could make people more sensitive to the issue of inflation

because it is likely that they have some concerns about the prices of goods increasing. Additionally, because the news article used as the treatment discussed the cost of goods at the grocery store, people who do much of the grocery shopping for their household experience inflation personally and could be more sensitive to priming from the article. For the same reason, those with lower income should also be more sensitive to priming.

H2: Among those who experience real-world conditions related to inflation problems (unemployment, grocery shopping, lower incomes), the strength of the priming effect should be stronger.

Next, scholars agree that political sophistication can make a difference for whether people are more likely to rely on pocketbook or sociotropic concerns when they vote for president or evaluate political candidates. However, there is a debate about who will be most likely to make pocketbook or sociotropic assessments (Gomez & Wilson, 2001; Mutz, 1993). Likewise, studies examining how priming is moderated by knowledge show mixed findings (Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). However, there is some evidence that for novel or complicated issues, those who are more knowledgeable are more likely to be primed (McGraw & Ling, 2003; Druckman & Holmes, 2004). Because the issue in this experiment is inflation, which is both relatively complicated and novel because it had not been on the agenda very much in the time preceding the study, it is likely that priming effects will be stronger for those who are knowledgeable.

Therefore, I hypothesize:

H3a. The priming effect should be more evident among the more knowledgeable than the less knowledgeable.

The same is likely to be true for other dimensions of political sophistication, particularly political interest. Therefore, I hypothesize:

H3b: The priming effect should be more evident among the more politically interested than the less politically interested.

Finally, partisanship may be an important variable to investigate. Partisanship can color perceptions of the economy, policy, and institutions relative to which party is currently in power. There are certainly partisan differences in how the economy or economic policy and institutions are perceived. Likewise, there are differences in how partisans feel about who is currently in office. Partisanship can also make a difference in how political or campaign messages are interpreted. Independents are more likely to shift opinions during campaigns than partisans (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960) and process information differently from partisans (Hillygus & Jackman, 2003). Researchers also argue that party identification moderates communication effects such as priming and framing, especially when the content of a communication is related to people's political predispositions (Malhotra & Margolit, 2010; see also Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Although the current studies do not use different partisan cues across messages as Malhotra and Margolit did, the arguments in all of the conditions may resonate more with Republicans than Democrats for two reasons. First, the conservative nature of the argument in the op-ed piece that was being manipulated might match Republican attitudes. Second, inflation is a traditionally Republican issue which may also mean Republicans would be more sensitive to the message (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). However, the article discusses rising prices at the grocery store, which could also

resonate with Democrats. Additionally, this message was consistent across conditions, with the only variation in content dealing with the societal-individual and near-distant future characteristic of the messages. Finally, the content of the message might be novel enough, because inflation is not high on the current agenda, that there are not well-developed partisan differences on the issue that might be accessible to strong partisans. It is unclear whether there will be differential effects by partisanship or whether independents will be the most affected by the message. Is it possible that Republicans, Democrats, or independents will respond to the differences in content across groups in different ways, changing the nature of the relationship between perceptions of how much better or worse things will come and presidential support? Therefore, I ask the following research question:

RQ1. Does party identification moderate priming?

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Overview**

Experiments are often used in priming and framing studies, although they are rarely used to examine sociotropic and symbolic politics. There is no experimental research on whether news story characteristics can make the relationship between personal and societal perceptions and political opinions stronger. Because this study deals with specific message factors that might influence attitudes, experiments are a good choice because they allow for small changes in messages to be examined in a way that is not feasible with traditional cross-sectional surveys. However, one drawback of experimental design is the reliance on convenience samples, usually undergraduate

students. The experiments in these chapters should avoid the drawbacks of traditional experimental designs because of the use of a more nationally representative adult sample.

The advantage of a national sample of adults is important for two reasons relating to the generalizability of the results. First, adults have more experience with a range of economic issues than students. College students' inexperience could mean that the treatments may not affect them in the same way that they would a representative sample of adults. In general, Sears (1986) advocated using adults rather than college students in many types of studies, including those that focus on self-interest, because college students are often considerably different from adult samples. Specifically, college students likely have such low means and variances on self-interest (i.e., actual experience with an issue) that uncovering linkages with other attitudes could be impossible. Second, a national sample should avoid results that may be an outcome of state level phenomenon. Because economic conditions vary by state, a state-based sample might not be generalizable to the country. For example, in June 2011, approximately four months before the study was conducted, Michigan had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country at 10.5%, whereas Nebraska's unemployment rate was 4.1% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

To test the hypotheses in this chapter, I conducted a national online survey experiment using the Internet survey research company YouGov Polimetrix. The study focused on the topic of inflation. Prior to the experiment, several pilots were conducted to get a better sense of how people perceived the issue of inflation as well as how they responded to several designs of the inflation stimuli material and question wording for a subset of the questions. The experiment in this chapter relied on a manipulation of



message characteristics to portray a close temporal perspective and a distant temporal perspective. It also manipulated individual and societal level consequences. The control group focused on an unrelated scientific topic without any of the treatment variables.

## **Background**

Although inflation was not a large part of the economic concerns in the most recent time points covered by the content analysis, it came up from time to time in the business news during the 2007-2009 recession. However, at the conclusion of the content analysis, during the time that the pilots were conducted, inflation received slightly more elevated attention as gas prices started to rise, and other related economic concerns (e.g., sluggish recovery of employment numbers) and social and political concerns (e.g., droughts making raw materials in several industries more scarce) became heightened (e.g., Appelbaum, 2011). At the conclusion of the pilots, and right before the experiment was run, the political and economic situation changed again. The debate in congress about raising the debt ceiling concluded with U.S. credit downgraded by the credit rating agency, Standard & Poor's. At the same time, a meeting of the Federal Reserve acknowledged that unemployment numbers had not been improving quickly enough, contributing to fears of a double dip recession. The European recession and debt problems also appeared to threaten the U.S. recovery. All of these events contributed to heavy volatility in the stock market during the second and third week of August. Interestingly, the topic of inflation received renewed interest in the press because three of the voting members of the Federal Reserve had opposed the Federal Reserve's plan to keep the interest rates low through 2013, citing issues with a possible sharp rise in

inflation. The consensus among most economists was that inflation was not likely to be a problem in the near term, especially with unemployment remaining high. Moreover, some Keynesians suggested that inflation might be good for the economy (Krugman, 2011; Norris, 2011).

However, by and large, inflation was not an issue on the media's agenda, either during the content analysis period or the time during which the experiments took place at the beginning of October. The issue of inflation was chosen for several reasons. First, despite inflation not being high on the current agenda, it is an issue that constantly cycles in and out of importance relative to other economic issues. For example, during the early 1980s, inflation skyrocketed, and was high on both the news and scholarly agendas. Moreover, it is important to economic policy, especially monetary policy, even where it is not a current topic in the media; the Federal Reserve is responsible for keeping prices stable, which involves keeping the rate of inflation low. Second, both inflation (for example, through the Consumer Price Index) and unemployment are indicators that are tracked and released to the news media on a monthly basis, which means that both issues tend to receive steady coverage of a sociotropic nature (although not necessarily front page coverage). Finally, unemployment, as opposed to inflation, had the drawback of being very high on the agenda over a prolonged period; it received an especially heavy amount of media and political attention in August and September 2011, one month before the experiment was conducted, and so the topic of unemployment may have been more difficult to work with if it was at a ceiling.

## **Pilot Testing**

Prior to finalizing the design of the experiment, several pilot studies were conducted. An initial pilot study was conducted among undergraduate participants, while three additional pilot studies were conducted using national adult samples and one additional pilot tested the control material. The national samples made use of Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website.<sup>20</sup> Two articles were chosen as potential control group material. These were tested using MTurk in the same way as the stimulus material. Both control articles appeared to be successful in not producing thoughts about the topic or other details from the potential treatments, as neither article generated high levels of thoughts about politics, government, inflation, the economy, or societal or personal perceptions. The article with the tone most closely matching the tone of the inflation articles was chosen as the control condition for this experiment. Overall, the pilot studies showed that the questions testing the degree of control in the articles were constant across conditions. The manipulations did not produce significant differences in the manipulation check questions until importance was statistically partialled out.

My goal with these manipulations was to keep them as consistent as possible across the four conditions while only making small changes to two key dimensions. My other goal was to maintain realistic stimuli that closely resembled a real news story. It was difficult to characterize inflation as something that would change rapidly for the temporal conditions. Likewise, there was not a wide range of ways in which inflation could be characterized, and many of the sample participants (especially on MTurk) were

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<sup>20</sup> MTurk is a website that allows employers to find workers to complete small tasks that cannot be completed by computers and usually do not require trained skills. However, researchers are able to use MTurk to post studies and recruit participants.

not used to high rates of inflation. This suggests that another issue with which a broader range of people had more immediate familiarity might have produced results more easily. It also highlights the difficulty inherent in the tension between creating realistic framing stimulus material and isolating the content that might produce the appropriate effects (Vraga, Carr, Nytes, & Shah, 2010). Based on the results of the experimental and control groups, as well as the insights gained by testing question wording, I moved forward with the experiment as it is described below.

### **Recruitment and Respondents**

For the experiment in this chapter, participants were surveyed by the research firm YouGov Polimetrix, sampling from their existing survey panel in September 2011. Polimetrix maintains a pool of over one million panel members, originally recruited from Web advertisements to participate in online surveys (although RDD telephone and mail recruitment are used to supplement their panels). Respondents were sampled from Polimetrix's larger panel using a matched random sample technique. To generate the matched sample, Polimetrix first takes a nationally representative random sample. They then draw a sample from their full panel by matching panel respondent characteristics with the nationally representative sample. For this study, YouGov interviewed 586 respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 500 based on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest. YouGov then weighted the matched set of survey respondents to known marginals from for the general U.S. population from the 2006 American Community Survey. Although this does not produce a probability based sample, this method likely produces a more diverse national sample

than would typically be available using convenience sampling or undergraduate participant pools that are common in experimental research. Ansolabehere and Schaffner (2011) found data from a YouGov opt-in Internet panel to produce similar results to RDD telephone samples using landline and cell phones. All analyses used the sample weights.

To recruit subjects for the study, YouGov Polimetrix notified the sample by email that a study was available for their participation and gave them a link to the Polimetrix website where they could participate. The email read, in part: “PollingPoint would like to invite you participate in a new public opinion survey. It costs nothing to participate and there is nothing to buy. The study takes about 25 minutes to complete.” Participants were sent up to three emails in total; if they did not participate upon the first request up to two reminder emails were sent. The surveys were self-administered online. To encourage participation in the study, respondents were awarded “PollingPoints” which could be redeemed for small gifts.

After all responses were collected, the data were examined to see whether people were either clicking through answers or not paying attention to the stimulus material. This was done by examining respondents’ answers on several knowledge recognition questions. Respondents in the treatment and control groups were asked one multiple choice question related to the text of the material in that condition. They were also asked to check statements from a list that appeared in the material they read. Those were treated as true-false questions. All recognition questions were coded as correct and incorrect and summed to form a recognition index. Out of nine possible correct answers in the treatment groups, 9.3% of the sample scored 5 or fewer correct, and they were dropped from the sample. The control group could get up to eight correct answers, and 13% of the

control group got only 5 or fewer questions correct; these were considered inattentive respondents and they were also dropped from the sample. Inattentive respondents were dropped from the sample in order to reduce random error (noise) so that results could be seen more clearly. This left a total sample size of  $N = 454$ , which is 90.8% of the original sample (although the weighted  $N = 445$ ).<sup>21</sup>

### **Questionnaire and Procedure**

Subjects were first given one version of the stimulus to read, which was randomly assigned. They were instructed to read the article and then advance the screen to answer questions. Once subjects finished reading the article, they were asked to list their thoughts on the article, except in the control condition, where they were asked to list their thoughts on the issue of inflation and rising prices. After the thought listing, they were asked about their attitudes on President Obama, followed by their opinions on government. Next, they were asked to provide their attitudes regarding a series of core closed-ended measures related to their prospective evaluations of various inflation-related outcomes at both personal and societal levels. Then, they were asked to evaluate their thought listings. Finally, they were asked about a series of variables that could potentially moderate the framing effects and they were also asked demographic questions.

### **The Experimental Manipulation**

While a handful of experimental studies have been designed to investigate how self-interest might influence politics, they usually use a communication stimulus as a

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<sup>21</sup> Weights ranged from .53 to 2.0.

means to an end—to generate self-interest or values without much focus on where such stimuli might be found in the real-world. This has resulted largely in question wording manipulations or short 2 to 3 sentence manipulations rather than a focus on news articles or other designs highlighting political communications that might have higher external validity. The stimuli in this study were designed to look like news articles for precisely the reason that political effects of this sort are likely to be media-driven in some way. Therefore, the experimental treatments in this study were designed to look like op-ed articles from a newspaper, which should have more external validity than similar earlier studies. The use of real newspaper articles in the creation of the stimulus material should also add to the external validity of the design.

The two key manipulations were based on wording changes in the news stories. There were five different conditions: a temporally near – individual condition, a temporally distant – individual condition, a temporally near – societal condition, a temporally distant – societal condition, and a control condition. The stimulus itself was designed to look like a newspaper story about inflation which discussed how rising food and clothing costs, along with Federal Reserve inaction on inflation, could create conditions of inflation in this country which could, in turn, affect both the price of goods and the value of savings accounts. The temporally near individual condition was entitled, “Inflation Could Soon Hit You in the Pocketbook.” The temporal distant individual conditions read, “Inflation Could Eventually Hit You in the Pocketbook.” The temporally near societal condition was, “Inflation Could Soon Affect the Nation,” while the temporally distant societal condition read, “Inflation Could Eventually Affect the Nation.” The control condition was an unrelated article about a scientific topic,

specifically the discovery of a new species. Thus, the study made use of an incomplete factorial design with five cells. One cell was a control group. The remaining cells were based on a 2x2 crossed design.

Each of the four stories was close to the same length, ranging between 350 and 373 words with a mean length of 363 words, and the control story had 343 words. The differences in the stories for the personal and national conditions were created largely through word changes such as “you” versus “Americans” and “the country.” The differences between the temporally near and distant conditions were created through word changes that indicated that the near future, such as “in the coming months,” or that indicated the distant future, such as “a year down the road.” The exact wording of each of the four versions can be found in Appendix A.

### **Manipulation Check and Random Assignment**

First, I checked to see whether the random assignment had worked as planned. There were no significant differences between groups for gender, race, education, age, party identification (coded as either 3 or 7 groups), or income.<sup>22</sup> Because there are no differences between groups on these variables, I do not use control variables in the analyses.

The manipulations, if they worked as expected, should have increased the salience of the self or the nation. Participants reading a news story with an individual frame should be more likely to think about themselves than those reading the societal frame or control story. Likewise, those reading a story with a near future frame should be more

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<sup>22</sup> Age and income were tested using ANOVA, while the other variables were tested using chi-square.



likely to think about themselves than those reading the distant future frame or control story. To check on whether people were having more self-focused thoughts in the near future and individual conditions and more other-directed thoughts in the distant future and societal conditions, the same thought listing technique from the pilots was used in the final version of the study (although an additional category about whether a thought dealt with how the article was written was added to help people rule out irrelevant thoughts). Immediately after reading the stimuli, respondents were asked to list their thoughts. Later, they were shown what they had listed and asked to code each of their thoughts as either being either “More about you as an individual,” “More about the country,” “This thought was about the way the article was written,” and “This thought was not relevant to the article or issue.”

To test this, I used regression to estimate the effect of the societal distance conditions on (a) the ratio of personal thoughts to total relevant thoughts, (b) the ratio of societal thoughts to total relevant thoughts, and (c) the difference between societal thoughts and personal thoughts. None of these tests approached marginal significance. These tests suggest that the manipulations were not working as expected. However, at least two other interpretations are plausible. The first is that the manipulations were working, but were too subtle to detect changes using the thought-listing technique.<sup>23</sup> It

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<sup>23</sup> In some cases there were effects of the conditions on the prospectations. Although there were no relationships between the societal treatments or the temporal treatments and personal prospectations, there was a significant relationship between being in the distant future condition compared to the control condition; those in the distant future condition were less likely to think that the country would get better ( $b = -.065$ ,  $se = .03$ ,  $p = .028$ ) and being in the distant future condition was linked to being marginally less likely to think that the country would get better compared to the near future condition ( $b = -.042$ ,  $se = .024$ ,  $p = .084$ ).

could also be that only subgroups within each condition were affected, which would not necessarily be clear in a direct test of each group.

## **Measures**

Because this study examines how message characteristics can make personal considerations or collective considerations more salient, the questionnaire incorporated moderating variables, predictor variables, and criterion variables. The dependent variables included policy opinions, domain specific presidential performance evaluations, and overall presidential job approval. Some questions came from the American National Elections Study, and other questions were designed specifically for the present experiment. A set of questions dealing with prospective evaluations of inflation were adapted from Mutz's (1992; 1994) questions about unemployment. Demographic questions were mostly the standard set used by YouGov Polimetrix, many of which come from The Pew Center for the People and the Press. However, these questions were supplemented with several real-world cue questions about spending habits as well as an unemployment question that I provided that attempted to make finer tuned distinctions between those who were working and those who were working but unsatisfied with their present work situation.

**Criterion Variables.** Respondents were asked six questions about both presidential approval, Federal Reserve approval, and about the role of government.

***Presidential Approval.*** Respondents were asked: "How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?" where they

could answer on a 7-point scale. This item was recoded to run from 0 = *strongly disapprove* to 1 = *strongly approve*  $M = .38, SD = .36$ .

***Presidential Economic Approval.*** On the same scale, respondents were asked: “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling the economy?” This was recoded to run from 0 = *strongly disapprove* to 1 = *strongly approve*  $M = .35, SD = .34$ .

***Presidential Inflation Approval.*** On the same scale another question asked, “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama and his administration are handling the issue of inflation?” which was also recoded as 0 = *strongly disapprove* to 1 = *strongly approve*  $M = .36, SD = .33$ .

***Federal Reserve Approval.*** Respondents were asked: “Do you approve or disapprove of the Federal Reserve making moves to improve the economy as it sees necessary?” on a 9-point scale. This item was recoded to run from 0 = *strongly disapprove* to 1 = *strongly approve*  $M = .57, SD = .30$ .

***Federal Reserve Trust.*** Respondents were asked: “On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means 'completely distrust' and 10 means 'completely trust' how much to you trust or distrust the Federal Reserve?” This item was recoded so that 0 = *Completely distrust* and 10 = *Completely trust*,  $M = .36, SD = .28$ .

***Social Welfare.*** “Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on their own. Which is closer to the way you feel?” The anchors were labeled 1 = *the government should see to it that every person has a good standard of living* and 7 = *the government should just let each person get ahead on their*

*own*. Respondents could also chose *don't know*. This was recoded to run from 0 (*get ahead on own*) to 1 (*government should see to it*). Those answering *don't know* were dropped ( $M = .45, SD = .34$ ).

**Predictor Variables.** The predictor variables were the perceptions about personal conditions and perceptions about national conditions. Both of these were prospective in nature, dealing with whether the participants thought things would get better or worse. Perceptions of future conditions were chosen largely because the information in the treatment conditions was forward looking. The treatments suggested that things would likely get worse in the future, and the questions dealing with perceptions focused on future expectations. As a result, these variables are referred to as *prospections* rather than perceptions in the discussion of measurement and analyses that follow. Two variables were created.

***Personal Prospections*** was based on the question, “we would like to know how much better or worse you think things will become in the next year. How much better or worse will each of the following become?” Respondents could answer on 9-point scales ranging from *much worse* to *much better*. Responses from “Your own economic situation?” were used. The scale was recoded to run from 0 = *much worse* to 1 = *much better*.  $M = .344, SD = .222$ .

***National Prospections*** was designed to use language that paralleled personal *prospections*. Respondents were asked the same stem as the personal *prospections*, and “The economic situation of others across the country” was selected. Respondents

answered on the same 9-point scale as personal prospections. The scale was recoded to run from 0 = *much worse* to 1 = *much better*.  $M = .314$ ,  $SD = .229$ .

**Moderating Variables.** The first set of moderating variables was based on political sophistication, which includes knowledge and political interest, and the second set of moderating variables was based on real-world conditions, which were income, unemployment, and whether respondents were the primary grocery shopper for their household. The last moderating variable was party identification.

**Knowledge.** To assess respondents' knowledge of economic conditions, respondents were asked an open-ended question about the current unemployment rate. The unemployment rates from April-October 2011 stayed between 9.0 and 9.2% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Anyone who wrote between 9.0 and 9.9% was considered correct and coded as 1. Any other answers were considered incorrect and were coded as 0. Just under half of respondents got this question correct (47.4%).

**Political Interest.** This was assessed by asking, "Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs . . .? They could answer "Most of the time" "Some of the time" "Only now and then" "Hardly at all" and "Don't Know." "Don't Know" responses were recoded to "Hardly at all." Responses were recoded to a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = *hardly at all* to 1 = *most of the time*,  $M = .712$ ,  $SD = .331$ .

**Income.** This question asked respondents, "Thinking back over the last year, what was your family's annual income?" There were 14 income categories that they could

choose from, where 1 = *less than \$10,000* and 14 = *\$150,000 or more*. Respondents also had an option of choosing “Prefer not to say.” A total of 63 respondents chose the latter option, and they were coded as missing.  $M = .497$   $SD = .276$ .

***Unemployment.*** Respondents were asked, “In the past year have you or anyone in your family been laid off or had trouble finding a job?” Responses were coded as 1 = *Yes* or 0 = *No*. Nearly half the sample had unemployment experience (49.2%).

***Food Shopping.*** For this variable, respondents were asked, “How much grocery shopping do you do for your household?” Answers were on a four point-scale: 1=I do all of it, 2=I do most of it, 3=Someone else does most of it, I do some of it, 4=Someone else does all of it. This variable was recoded so that respondents who did all or most of the shopping were recoded as 1 and respondents who did not do the shopping or for whom someone else did most of the shopping were coded as 0. Those who do not food shop were 27.3% of the sample.

***Party identification.*** Respondents were asked a branching question about their party identification. It read: “Generally speaking, so you think of yourself as a . . .? Democrat, Republican, Independent, Other (please specify), Not Sure.” For those selecting either party, the follow up question asked, “Would you call yourself a STRONG [Democrat/Republican] or a NOT VERY STRONG [Democrat/Republican]?” while those selecting Independent, Other, or Not Sure were asked, “Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Republican Party or Democratic Party?” The resulting variable was recoded so that people were not sure of their party identification were considered independents. It was then dummy coded for Democrats and Republicans, and

independents were the excluded category. Democrats were 44% of the sample, Republicans were 38.5% of the sample, and independents made up 17.4%.

### **Analytic Strategy**

In order to understand how the treatment and control conditions affect the relationship between personal and national prospections and evaluations of the president and government, the analysis was conducted in several stages. For each stage, a series of OLS regressions was used to examine the interactive relationships between conditions and prospections on the outcome variables. In all analyses of social distance the excluded category is the societal group so that it can be compared to the individual group (and also the control group). Although the control group typically serves as a baseline, in most cases in this chapter, the differences of interest are between the individual and societal groups. Likewise, for all analyses of temporal distance, the excluded group is the near future condition so that it can be compared to distant future (and control) condition. In other words, the excluded group in both the social and temporal distance analyses is the condition most commonly found in the typical media environment.

All analyses were conducted with the given population weights. For all interactive analyses, multiplicative interaction terms were used. To lessen the potential for multicollinearity and for ease of interpretation, (non-dummy) component variables in the multiplicative interaction terms and control variables were mean-centered (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003). Significant interactive relationships are presented as figures. Although some interactive analyses showed that the control group was significantly different from one or both of the

treatment groups, those figures are not depicted because such findings are less substantively interesting. Figures are based on predictions made from the regression line, where the parameters of interest are held at one standard deviation above and below the mean and other predictors are held at their means.

## Results

Although all of the hypotheses deal explicitly with interactions between prospections and the experimental conditions, I conducted a preliminary analysis looking only at control group respondents in order to get a sense of the basic relationship between the variables in the absence of the treatment conditions. First, looking among control group respondents only, regression results indicate that there is a significant relationship between national prospections and the three presidential approval variables, whereas none of the personal prospections are significant. There were relationships between national prospections ( $b = 1.047$ ,  $se = 1.181$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and presidential approval, national prospections and approval of the president on inflation ( $b = .787$ ,  $se = .176$ ,  $p < .0001$ ), and national prospections and approval of the president on the economy ( $b = .919$ ,  $se = .184$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).<sup>24</sup> Additionally, among only the control group respondents, there was a significant positive relationship between national prospections and social welfare support such that the better things were projected to become for the country, the more people thought that the government should assist with living standards ( $b = .498$ ,  $se = .211$ ,  $p$

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<sup>24</sup> Among the full sample, national prospections ( $b = .811$ ,  $se = .083$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and personal prospections ( $b = .173$ ,  $se = .086$ ,  $p = .044$ ) are both significantly and positively related to presidential approval. For presidential inflation approval, national prospections ( $b = .708$ ,  $se = .076$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and personal prospections ( $b = .195$ ,  $se = .078$ ,  $p = .012$ ) are both positive and significant. Likewise, national prospections ( $b = .731$ ,  $se = .08$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) and personal prospections ( $b = .220$ ,  $se = .083$ ,  $p = .008$ ) are positively and significantly related to presidential economy approval.



= .02), although personal prospections were not related to social welfare opinions. There were only marginally significant positive relationships for the control group between Federal Reserve approval and national prospections ( $b = .294$ ,  $se = .171$ ,  $p = .089$ ) and personal prospections ( $b = .327$ ,  $se = .168$ ,  $p = .056$ ). Finally, only national prospections were significantly and positively related to trust in the Federal Reserve ( $b = .713$ ,  $se = .164$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).<sup>25</sup> The results for the presidential approval variables among control group respondents are consistent with findings from the economic voting literature because they show a relationship between national prospections and presidential approval, while personal prospections were not significantly related to approval.<sup>26</sup>

### **Social Distance Results**

The next set of investigations used the social distance groups from the experiment to look at whether they affected the relationship between prospections and evaluations. To test the social distance part of H1, a series of regressions was run to look among each experimental group for the relationship between personal prospections and presidential

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<sup>25</sup> Among the full sample, results are as follows. The more things are seen as getting worse personally, the more likely people are to want the government to intervene ( $b = -.233$ ,  $se = .101$ ,  $p = .021$ ) while the better things are seen as getting for the country, the more likely people are to want the government to intervene ( $b = .587$ ,  $se = .097$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). National prospections are significantly and positively related to approval of the Federal Reserve ( $b = .360$ ,  $se = .083$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) although personal prospections are only marginally related ( $b = .160$ ,  $se = .086$ ,  $p = .063$ ). Lastly, only national prospections are related to trust in the Federal Reserve ( $b = .560$ ,  $se = .069$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

<sup>26</sup> It is possible that instead of increasing the salience of personal and national prospections in subsequent evaluations, the experimental conditions could have had a direct effect on the outcome variables themselves. However, it seems unlikely to hypothesize that being in one condition over another would have any relationship with a change in the outcome variable. For example, it might be surprising, although plausible, that reading a story about inflation emphasizing the individual should decrease support for the president compared to reading a story about inflation emphasizing the nation. This is because shifting one's focus between the self and nation should not uniformly shift national evaluations in a positive or negative way unless there was something else in the news coverage to affect the direction of individuals' attitudes – something I attempted to control. This notion is supported; there were no direct effects of the conditions either the presidential approval or government support variables.

and government approval and between national prospections and presidential and government approval. Results for H1a, presented in columns 1, 3, and 5 of Table 3.1, indicate that none of the interaction terms between personal prospections and presidential approval are significant. Likewise, results for H1b, presented in columns 2, 4, and 6 of Table 3.1, indicate that the interactions between national prospections and presidential approval were not significant. The conditions were not able to differentially increase the salience of either personal prospections or national prospections in presidential evaluations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The national and personal prospections (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> rows) are the prospections for the societal group. The positive signs on personal and national prospections show that among the societal group, the better (worse) people think that things will become, the more likely they are to approve (disapprove) of the job that the president is doing. The interaction terms indicate the change in slope between the societal group compared to the other two groups (the individual and control groups). Interaction terms for all of the personal prospections are positive. Adding the personal prospections, which are positive, to the interaction terms, which are also positive, shows that being in the individual or control groups increases personal prospections relative to the societal condition. On the other hand, for national prospections, some of the interaction terms are positive and some are negative. The interaction terms between the individual group and national prospections are all negative. Combining this with the positive national prospections shows that being in the individual group decreases national prospections relative to being in the societal group. Finally, using the same logic, being in the societal group decreases national prospections relative to the control group, except for inflation approval. Although these show the hypothesized results when comparing the two treatment groups to each other, in all cases, the control group had the strongest relationships between prospections and presidential approval. However, interpreting these relationships should be done with caution since the slopes are not significantly different from one another.

Table 3.1 Predicting Presidential Approval Variables with National and Personal Prospections, by Social Condition.

	Presidential Approval		Inflation Approval		Economic Approval	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Control Group	-.03 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	-.03 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)
Individual Treatment	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.04)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)
National Prospections (Centered)	.81** (.08)	.80** (.16)	.72** (.08)	.70** (.11)	.74** (.08)	.71** (.11)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.14 (.11)	.18* (.09)	.16 (.10)	.20* (.08)	.18# (.11)	.22** (.08)
Control x Prospections	.12 (.17)	.21 (.18)	.15 (.16)	-.13 (.16)	.13 (.17)	.19 (.17)
Individual x Prospections	.03 (.14)	-.05 (.13)	.02 (.13)	-.01 (.12)	.04 (.13)	-.02 (.13)
<i>N</i>	439	439	439	439	434	434
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.360	.363	.362	.362	.355	.356

*Note.* Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1. The type of prospections that were used as the focal independent variable in the interaction terms are listed at the top of the column for each regression. Prospections are centered at the mean.

#*p*<.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01.

On the other hand, Table 3.2 shows that the conditions did affect the relationship between prospections and general social welfare support and prospections and Federal Reserve approval. The first column of Table 3.2 shows that the societal and control group differed from one another (as did the individual and control group). Respondents in the control group were more likely to endorse government support of the quality of living to

the extent they thought things would get better for themselves personally. For the societal and individual groups, the effect is reversed; the better that people thought things would get for them personally, the less they wanted to see government support for living standards. The last column of Table 3.2 shows a significant stronger positive relationship between Federal Reserve approval and national prospections among the individual group relative to the societal group (and also compared to the control group, though not significantly). This relationship is presented in Figure 3.1 and is the opposite of the hypothesized relationship; in this case, instead of the societal group strengthening the relationship between national prospections and Federal Reserve approval, it is the individual group that does.

Table 3.2 Predicting Attitudes about Government with National and Personal Prospections, by Social Condition.

	Social Welfare Support		Trust in the Federal Reserve		Approval of the Federal Reserve	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Control Group	-.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	-.03 (.03)	-.04 (.04)	-.03 (.04)
Individual Treatment	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)
National Prospections (Centered)	.61** (.10)	.54** (.13)	.56** (.07)	.51** (.10)	.36** (.08)	.20# (.12)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	-.35** (.13)	-.23* (.10)	.04 (.09)	.09 (.07)	.03 (.11)	.17* (.09)
Control x Prospections	.44* (.20)	.20 (.21)	-.06 (.20)	.09 (.15)	.26 (.17)	.19 (.18)
Individual x Prospections	.06 (.16)	.04 (.15)	.16 (.11)	.10 (.11)	.24# (.14)	.28* (.13)
<i>N</i>	423	423	439	439	430	430
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.106	.098	.269	.266	.142	.143

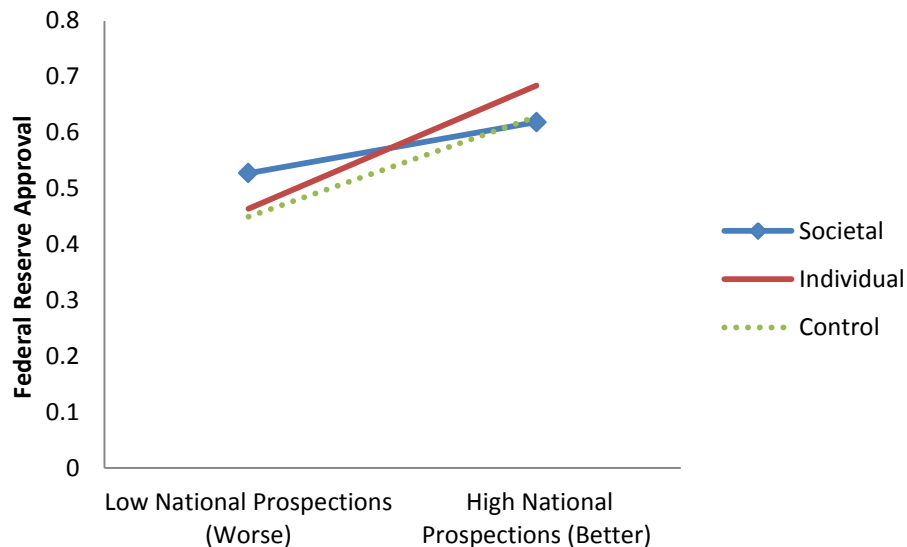
*Note.* Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1. The type of prospections that were used as the focal independent variable in the interaction terms are listed at the top of the column for each regression. Prospections are centered at the mean.

#*p*<.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01.

Taken together, Table 3.1 and 3.2 show that there is little support among the social distance conditions for either H1a or H1b, where it was expected that there would be stronger relationships between personal prospections and presidential and governmental support among those who receive the individual article relative to the

control and societal groups. The same conclusion can be drawn about the societal group and national prospections.

Figure 3.1 The Relationship between Federal Reserve Approval and National Prospections, by Social Condition



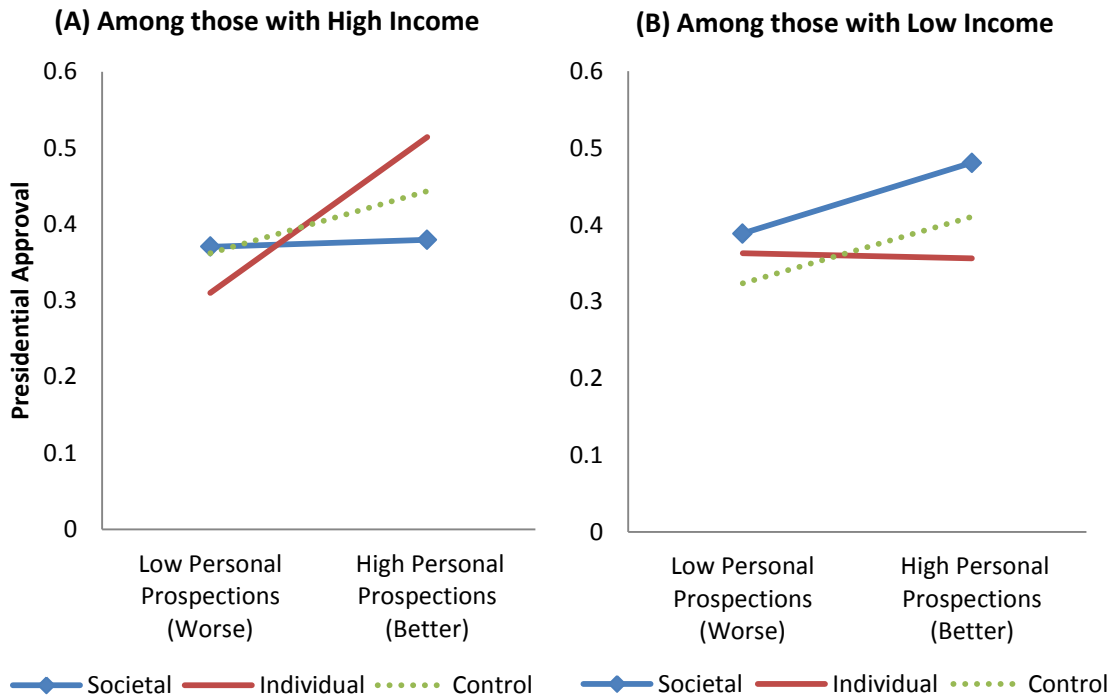
Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted Federal Reserve approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.

To examine the rest of the hypotheses in this chapter, sets of three-way interactions were run to look at the priming effect among different groups. Only significant findings will be presented in tables and figures. H2, which was about real-world conditions looked at the priming hypotheses moderated by unemployment, grocery shopping, and income. First, it was expected that those who were unemployed would experience stronger priming effects than those who were employed. This was not supported; there were no significant differences between conditions for those who were unemployed compared to those who were employed. Also, it was expected that those that

did all or most of the food shopping would experience stronger priming effects than those who did not spend much time in the grocery store. Again, there were no significant differences between groups.

Finally, it was hypothesized that those with low income would experience stronger priming effects than those with high income. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show that the relationships between personal prospections and both presidential approval and presidential economy approval could be strengthened, although the relationships are more complicated than hypothesized. The individual condition strengthened personal prospections and presidential approval only among the high income group. For presidential inflation approval in Figure 3.3, panel A, there is no difference for the high income group between effects from the individual group and the control condition (although they are stronger than the societal group as would be expected). In contrast, the individual condition decreased the strength of personal prospections in presidential evaluations relative to the other groups. This finding is somewhat surprising. In both Figure 3.2 B and 3.3 B (low income individuals), the slope for the individual group is close to being zero, which indicates that feeling like things would be getting better or worse made little difference to how they viewed the president. This suggests that those with low income did not link their views of inflation relative to their personal conditions to presidential approval, perhaps because they see themselves rather than the president as responsible for being able to afford things. Another possible explanation is that income is operating much as knowledge would because income (as part of socioeconomic status) and knowledge are both related to education. Nevertheless, taken together, the findings from the tests of real-world conditions provide little support for the second hypothesis.

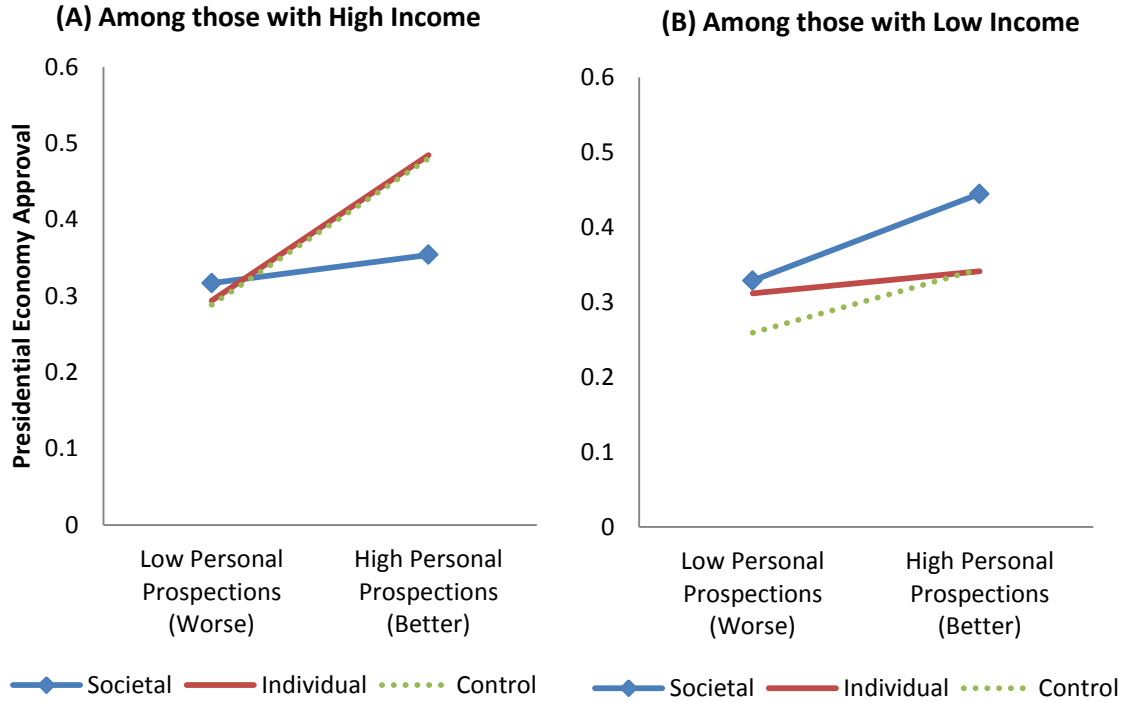
Figure 3.2 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Income and Social Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.



Figure 3.3 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Economy Approval, by Income and Social Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential economy approval. Low personal prospctions are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospctions are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospctions. Prospctions are centered at the mean.

Next, H3a and b predict that knowledge and political interest will moderate the priming relationship. Results show that there were no significant relationships by levels of political interest. The individual group and societal group were only marginally different among levels of political interest for the relationship between personal prospctions and the three presidential approval variables. However, knowledge made a difference. Table 3.3 shows that the individual group is significantly different from the societal group for both those with unemployment knowledge and those without it across the relationships between personal prospctions and the three presidential approval

variables. Likewise, although not shown in the table, the individual group was also significantly different from the control group for presidential approval and inflation approval, and marginally significant for economic approval.

These significant relationships are depicted in Figures 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6. These figures show that the pattern of results is the same across the three presidential approval variables. The relationship between personal prospections and the three presidential approval variables is strengthened in the individual condition among the knowledgeable respondents, relative to both the control condition and the societal condition (as in 3.4 A, 3.5 A, and 3.6 A). This shows that the better the knowledgeable respondents think that their personal finances will become, the more strongly they support the president—which is boosted in the individual condition relative to the two other conditions. The results are the opposite for those who are not knowledgeable.

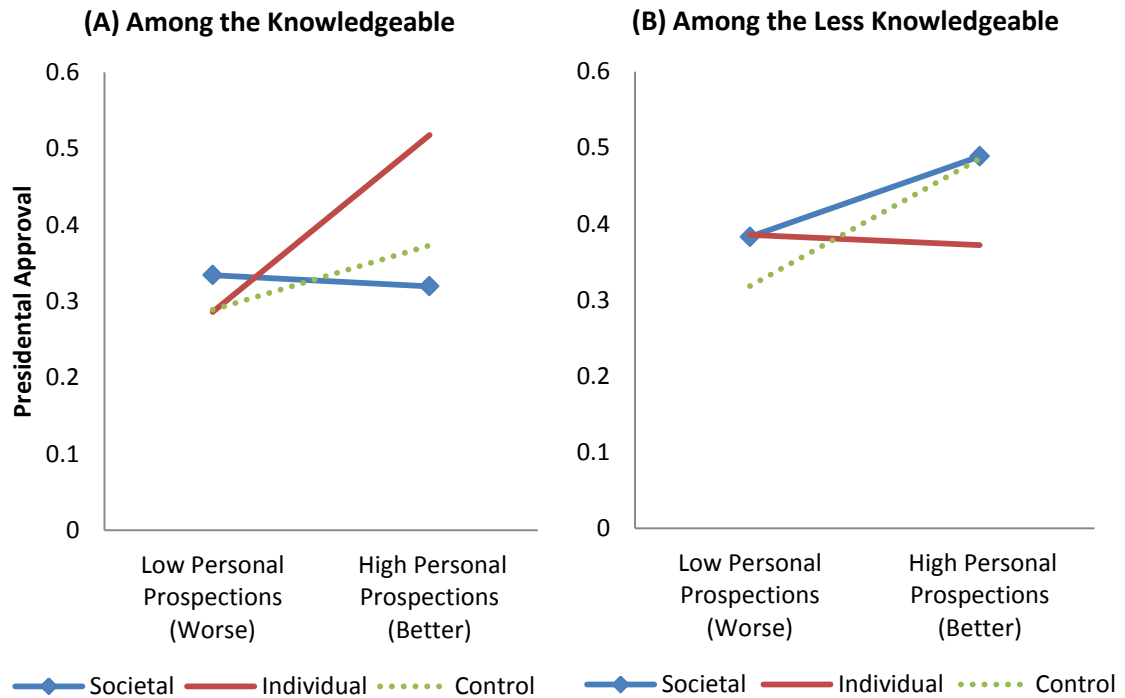
Table 3.3 Predicting Presidential Approval with National and Personal Prospections, by Social Condition and Knowledge.

	Presidential Approval		Inflation Approval		Economic Approval	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Control Group	-.03 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	-.05 (.05)	-.04 (.05)	-.04 (.05)
Individual Treatment	-.06 (.04)	-.06 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.03 (.04)
National Prospections (Centered)	.81** (.08)	.76** (.15)	.71** (.08)	.63** (.14)	.73** (.08)	.70** (.15)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.24# (.14)	.18* (.09)	.21# (.12)	.19* (.08)	.28* (.13)	.22** (.08)
Knowledge	-.11* (.04)	-.10* (.04)	-.08# (.04)	-.07# (.04)	-.08# (.04)	-.07# (.04)
Control x Knowledge	.04 (.08)	-.04 (.08)	.06 (.07)	.05 (.07)	.05 (.07)	.05 (.07)
Individual x Knowledge	.13* (.06)	.13* (.06)	.09 (.06)	.09 (.06)	.11# (.06)	.11# (.06)
Control x Prospections	-.14 (.26)	.40 (.25)	.30 (.24)	.31 (.23)	.16 (.26)	.27 (.25)
Individual x Prospections	-.27 (.19)	-.21 (.18)	-.21 (.17)	-.11 (.17)	-.21 (.18)	-.16 (.18)
Prospections x Knowledge	-.27 (.19)	-.01 (.20)	-.15 (.17)	.07 (.18)	-.26 (.18)	-.04 (.19)
Knowledge x Individual x Prospections	.83** (.28)	.52# (.27)	.63* (.26)	.34 (.25)	.70* (.27)	.46# (.26)
Knowledge x Control x Prospections	.08 (.35)	-.30 (.35)	-.19 (.32)	-.28 (.32)	.06 (.34)	-.09 (.35)
<i>N</i>	439	439	439	439	434	434
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.385	.386	.380	.377	.371	.370

*Note.* Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1. The type of prosppections that were used as the focal independent variable in the interaction terms are listed at the top of the column for each regression. Prospections are centered at the mean.

#*p*<.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01.

Figure 3.4 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Unemployment Knowledge and Social Condition.

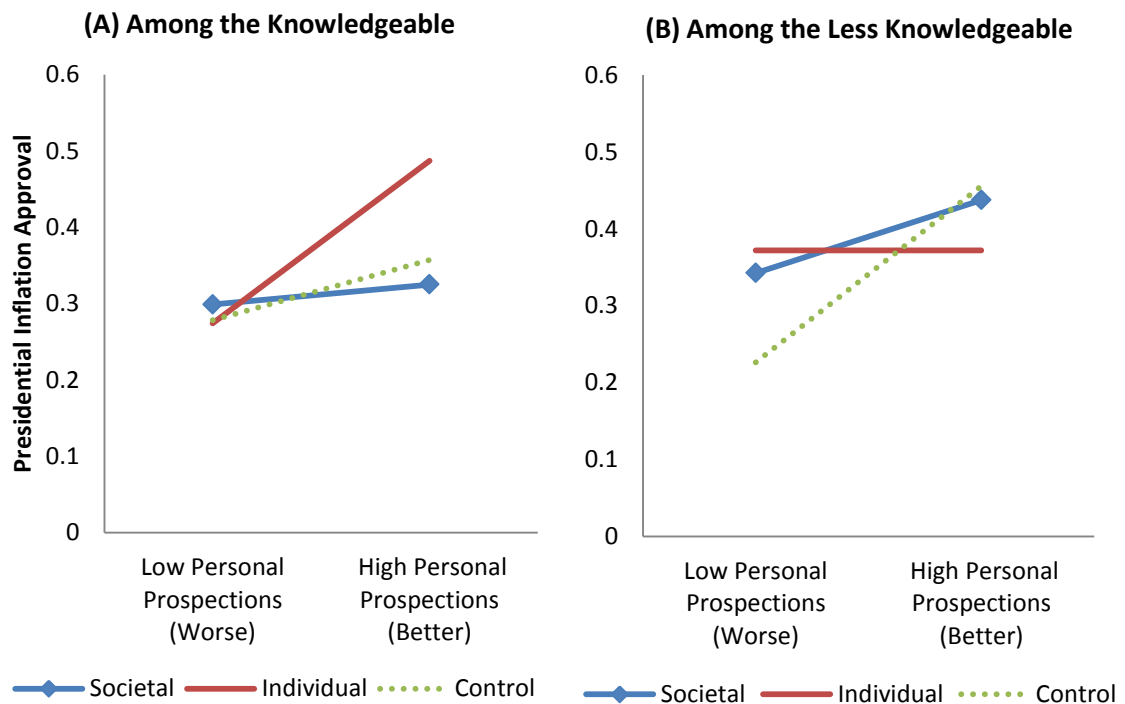


Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.

Panel B of Figures 3.4-3.6 shows that, for those lacking unemployment knowledge, the control group has the strongest relationship between personal prospections and the presidential approval variables, suggesting that both conditions had an attenuating effect relative to the control group. For those without knowledge, the societal group has a stronger relationship between personal prospections and presidential approval relative to the individual group, while the individual group shows no difference in approval for low and high prospections. These findings also resemble the surprising findings for those with lower income. Those without knowledge, like those with lower

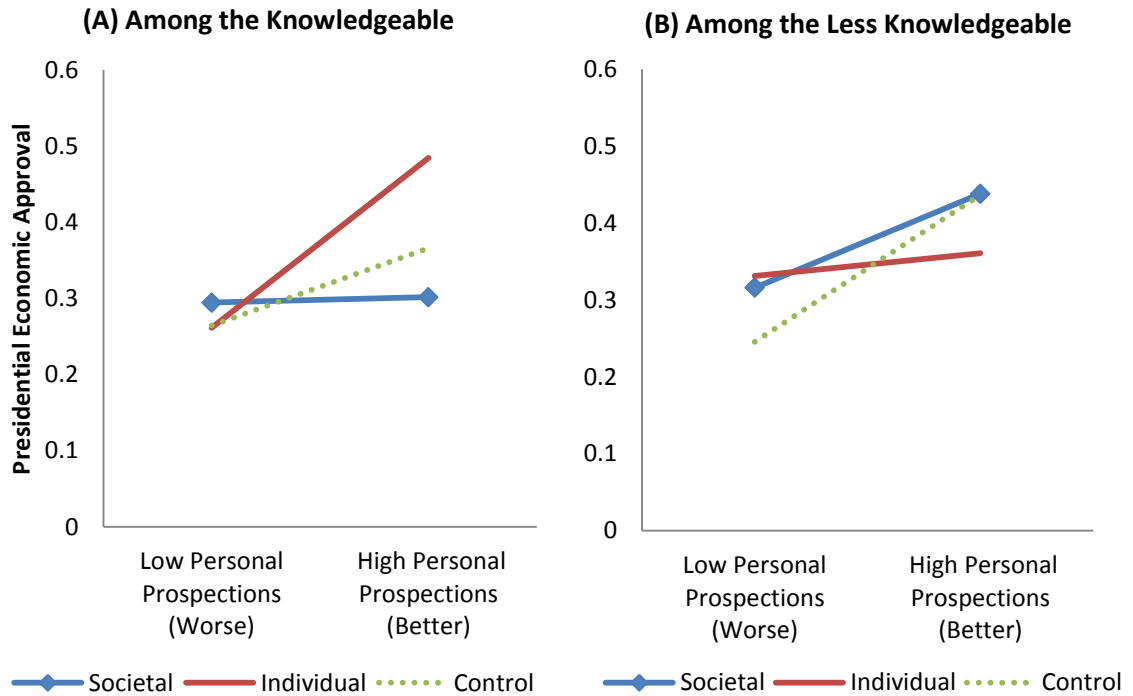
income, might not be able to link their personal economic situation with the president when they are in the personal condition, while the societal condition does provide them with somewhat more context with which to link their personal situation to the president. However, because they are more likely, in the absence of either treatment to link their personal concerns to presidential approval, there must be something about the content that is distracting them from doing so.

Figure 3.5 The Relationship Between Personal Prospections and Presidential Inflation Approval, by Unemployment Knowledge and Social Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted inflation approval of the president. Low personal prosppections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prosppections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prosppections. Prosppections are centered at the mean.

Figure 3.6 The Relationship Between Personal Prospections and Presidential Economic Approval, by Unemployment Knowledge and Social Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted inflation approval of the president. Low personal prospctions are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospctions are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospctions. Prospctions are centered at the mean.

Finally, RQ1 asked whether party identification would significantly moderate the relationships among condition, prospctions, and presidential and governmental approval. However, party identification did not appear to moderate any of the relationships (so it is not depicted).

In sum, this section tested the hypothesized relationships for the societal conditions, examining differences between the individual and societal groups. There was little support for either of the main priming hypotheses (H1a and H1b) except in the single instance where national prospctions factored into Federal Reserve approval,

although this was the opposite of the expected relationship. Examining whether real-world cues could further specify the priming relationship (H2) met with little success, except that income significantly moderated. Although income was associated with the extent of the relationship between personal prospections and presidential approval, the relationship occurred for those of high income rather than low income as was expected. On the other hand, knowledge significantly moderated the interaction between conditions and personal prospections for presidential approval as expected (H3a), but interest did not moderate (H3b). Finally, a research question asked whether partisanship would moderate, and it did not. It is notable that for all of the significant outcomes except for one, prospections were related to presidential approval but not the government attitude variables. In the next section, I examine the same set of hypotheses, this time focusing on the temporal distance conditions.

### **Temporal Distance Variables**

The next set of investigations used the temporal distance groups from the experiment to look at whether they affected the relationship between prospections and evaluations. First, tests of both H1a and H1b for the presidential approval variables are shown in Table 3.4. The table shows that there are no significant priming effects for any of the presidential approval variables. That is, the relationships between prospections and presidential approval remain the same across all three conditions.

Table 3.4 Predicting Presidential Approval Variables with National and Personal Prospections, by Temporal Condition.

	Presidential Approval		Inflation Approval		Economic Approval	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Control Group	-.01 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	-.03 (.04)	.00 (.04)	-.00 (.04)
Distant Future Treatment	.03 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.04 (.03)	.04 (.03)
National Prospections (Centered)	.83** (.08)	.85** (.11)	.73** (.08)	.73** (.10)	.76** (.08)	.76** (.10)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.07 (.12)	.17* (.09)	.10 (.11)	.20* (.08)	.11 (.12)	.22* (.08)
Control x Prospections	.18 (.18)	.16 (.18)	.20 (.16)	.10 (.16)	.19 (.18)	.15 (.17)
Distant Future x Prospections	.12 (.14)	-.14 (.13)	.11 (.13)	-.07 (.12)	.14 (.13)	-.09 (.13)
N	439	439	.362	.362	.359	.360
R <sup>2</sup>	.362	.365	439	439	434	434

*Note.* Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1. The type of prospections that were used as the focal independent variable in the interaction terms are listed at the top of the column for each regression. Prospections are centered at the mean.

# $p < .10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

On the other hand, Table 3.5 shows that there were significant differences between conditions on the relationship between prospections and the government evaluation variables. Specifically, the first column of Table 3.5 shows that there is a marginally significant difference between the control group and near future group (and not shown, a significant difference between the distant future and control group). The control group is more likely to support government intervention into citizen wellbeing the



better things will get for them personally. However, in both the near and distant future groups the effect is the opposite; the worse things will get personally, the greater the support for government intervention.

Table 3.5 Predicting Government Attitudes with National and Personal Prospections, by Temporal Condition.

	Social Welfare Support		Trust in the Federal Reserve		Approval of the Federal Reserve	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Control Group	-.00 (.04)	-.00 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	-.03 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	-.02 (.04)
Distant Future Treatment	-.03 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.04 (.03)	.04 (.03)
National Prospections (Centered)	.61** (.10)	.58** (.13)	.57** (.07)	.54** (.09)	.39** (.08)	.38** (.11)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	-.30* (.14)	-.23* (.10)	.05 (.10)	.08 (.07)	-.07 (.12)	.15# (.09)
Control x Prospections	.39# (.21)	.15 (.21)	-.07 (.15)	.06 (.15)	.34# (.18)	.02 (.18)
Distant Future x Prospections	-.03 (.16)	-.05 (.15)	.10 (.12)	.06 (.18)	.33* (.14)	-.03 (.13)
N	423	423	439	439	430	430
R <sup>2</sup>	.105	.097	.268	.266	.150	.137

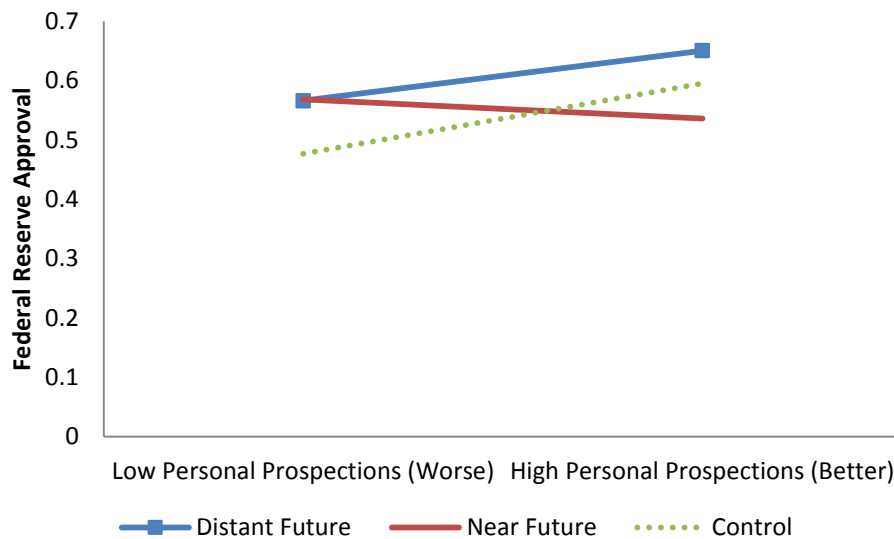
*Note.* Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1. The type of prospections that were used as the focal independent variable in the interaction terms are listed at the top of the column for each regression. Prospections are centered at the mean.

# $p < .10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Additionally, in the fifth column of Table 3.5 there is a significant difference between the near and distant future conditions and a marginally significant one between the control and near future conditions. Depicted in Figure 3.7, the distant future group

resembled the control group; both show that the better things were projected to become personally, the more likely that respondents' supported the Federal Reserve. On the other hand, for the near future group, there was very little difference in Federal Reserve support whether things were projected to get better or worse; however, it does appear that there is slightly less support in the near future condition where respondents perceived that things were improving. Because it was thought that the near future condition would strengthen the relationship between personal prospections and support relative to the control and distant future conditions, this was surprising. Perhaps those in the near future condition were more worried about inflation, such that when things looked worse for them, they were more hopeful that the Federal Reserve policy would help them personally.

Figure 3.7 The Relationship between Federal Reserve Approval and Personal Prospections, by Temporal Condition



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted Federal Reserve approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.

Next, H2 hypothesized that real-world conditions would differentially affect the relationships hypothesized in H1 a-b. Neither income nor unemployment moderated the priming relationship. However, there were differences among those who food shopped regularly and those who did not for two sets of relationships between conditions, prospecting, and Approval of the Federal Reserve. Figures 3.8 and 3.9 depict the two significant relationships. Figure 3.8 shows that among the shoppers there is a significant priming effect of the near future condition on the relationship between personal prospecting and Trust in the Federal Reserve relative to both the control and distant future groups. This shows the expected relationship. On the other hand, there is little difference between the control and near future groups among the non-shoppers. In these groups, there is slightly more Federal Reserve Trust as things personally improve, but the effect seems to be mostly among the shoppers, as might be expected.

Figure 3.8 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Federal Reserve Trust by Food Shopping Experience and Temporal Condition.

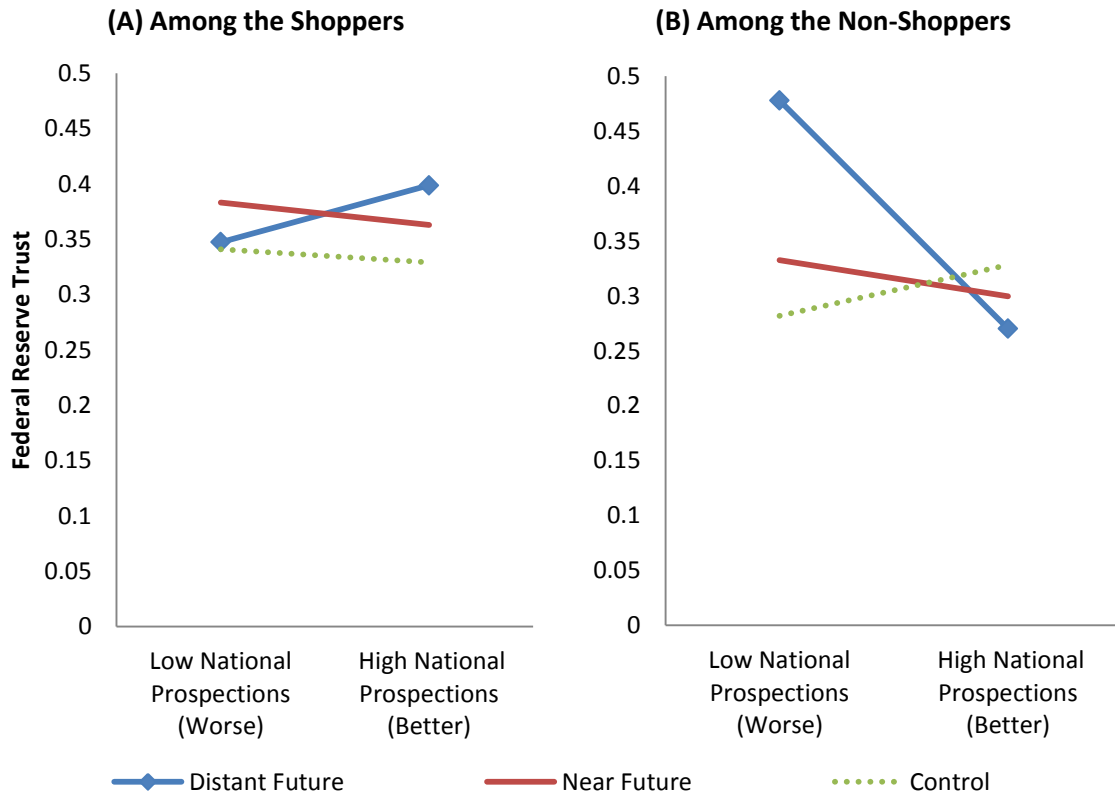


Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted Federal Reserve trust. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.

Figure 3.9, Panel A shows that among the shoppers, there is a priming effect of the distant future condition relative to the control group (and that the control group resembles the near future group, as might be expected). This is the expected relationship. That is, among the distant future group, prospections about the country factor more strongly and positively into Federal Reserve trust. On the other hand, Figure 3.9, Panel B shows a surprising relationship. Both conditions are negatively related to trust in the Federal Reserve, which is even stronger among the distant future condition. It is not clear why this may be occurring. Perhaps there is something going on that is unaccounted for.

However, based on the other relationships found for the shoppers and lack of moderation for income and unemployment, there is only partial support for H2.

Figure 3.9 The Relationship between National Prospections and Federal Reserve Trust, by Food Shopping Experience and Temporal Condition.

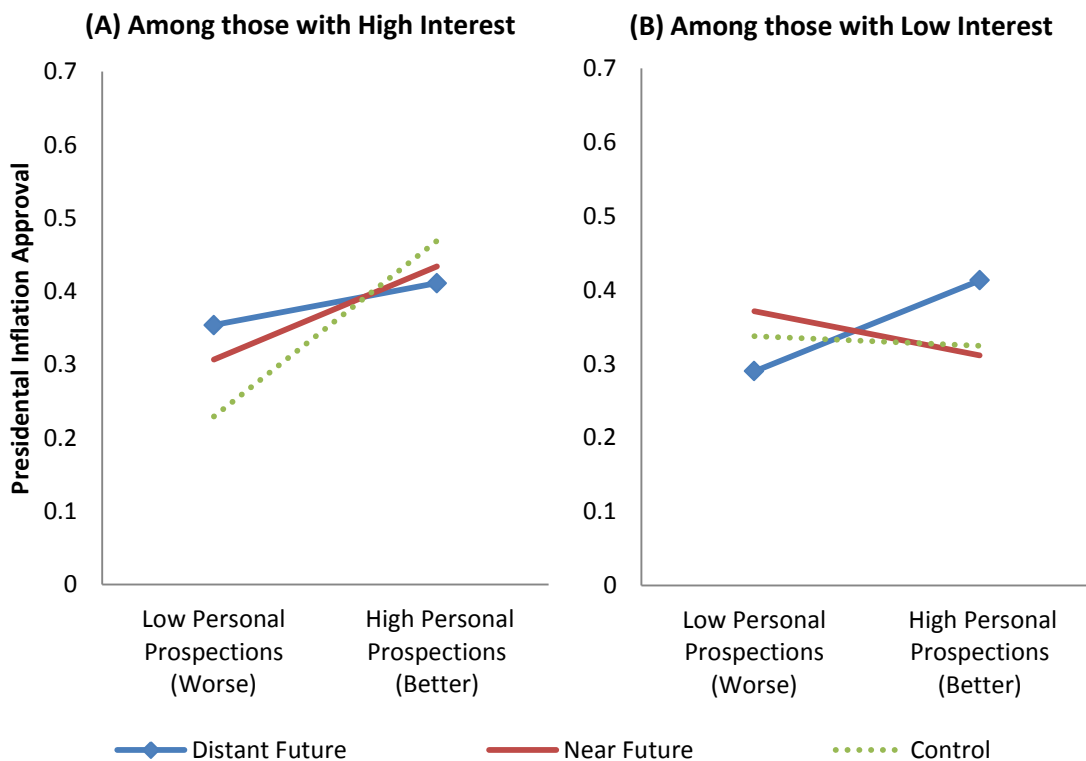


Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted Federal Reserve trust. Low national prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high national prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.

Next, H3a and H3b predicted that knowledge and interest would moderate the priming relationship. Regressions indicated that knowledge did not moderate. Likewise, in most cases, there was no moderating relationship of political interest. Figure 3.10 shows the only moderating relationship for interest. Panel A of Figure 3.10 show that among the highly interested in politics, both the near and distant future groups had a

dampening effect on the relationship between personal prospections and the presidential inflation evaluation relative to the control group. The near future condition, however, did appear to strengthen the relationship between personal prospections and inflation approval relative to the distant future condition as expected. Among the less interested, in Panel B of the same figure, the distant future condition, rather than the near future one, seems to have primed the relationship between personal prospections and inflation approval.

Figure 3.10 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Interest in Politics and Temporal Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential inflation approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Prospections are centered at the mean.

Despite the findings in Figure 3.10, there is not much support for the moderating effects of knowledge and interest. Likewise, regressions indicate that there is no support for party identification as a moderator either (RQ1). Considering all of the interactions run for the temporal distance variables, there is little evidence that they have consistent priming effects. Perhaps this is because the distinctions between the near and distant future conditions were not very strong. Studies examining time horizons and time discounting in health, economics, and construal level theory tend to use the present or very near future relative to a more distant future because people tend to discount time not very far into the future. People tend to engage in “hyperbolic discounting” where they discount time horizons very rapidly for small delays and then the drop off becomes less steep the further out the time horizon (Frederick, Loewenstein, O’Donoghue, 2002). It could be that to see greater differences, a near future condition would have to be much more immediate—an unlikely scenario for a discussion of changes in inflation.

### **Conclusion**

Though there were minimal priming effects and few findings for the temporal distance conditions, the social distance manipulation did show evidence that the salience between prospections and political evaluations could be strengthened once audience characteristics were taken into account. Although real-world experience was hypothesized to strengthen the priming effect among those who had the most direct experience with a weak economy, this hypothesis was not supported. Direct experience with unemployment and grocery shopping did not moderate the priming effect, although

income did. However, the priming effect occurred among the high income individuals rather than the low income individuals. Party identification also had little effect, nor did interest. On the other hand, knowledge had a strong and consistent pattern of moderating effects. Among the knowledgeable, the individual condition increased the salience of personal prospections in presidential evaluations.

One important pattern across the findings for moderation among the social distance interactions is that it was personal prospections rather than national prospections that were able to see increases (and decreases) in salience. Perhaps this is because if most news tends to be societally oriented, then it is not surprising that it would be more difficult to push the salience of nationally-oriented attitudes one way or the other in evaluations of the president or national government. On the other hand, since news stories use personal or individual orientations less often, when they do, it might heighten the salience of the self in national evaluations, especially among certain segments of the population.

Additionally, both those at higher levels of income and higher levels of knowledge were more likely to have the salience of their personal evaluations increased in their national political evaluations when they were in the individual condition. These findings appear to be consistent with the literature. For example, Gomez and Wilson (2001) argued that the most knowledgeable are more likely to make pocketbook evaluations because they recognize how national policies can affect their personal situations. Likewise, Krosnick and Brannon (1993) argue that the knowledgeable should be most susceptible to priming because they can easily access previous connections that



they have made about an issue. It seems that the individual condition may have reminded knowledgeable respondents about how their personal economic situation was connected to national policies. Likewise, those with higher income may be more financially savvy and are better able to link their personal economic situation to government policy when they are reminded of their own pocketbooks. What is surprising is that for low income and low knowledge individuals, being in the individual group actually appeared to attenuate the degree to which personal prospections factored into their evaluations of the president. Perhaps being reminded of potential future problems with their own financial situations was concerning enough to not make the link to national policy and they were only able to consider their personal situations.

The priming effects in this chapter were not evident until the characteristics of the respondents were examined. Inflation is a difficult issue to comprehend for many people. Likewise, the differences between conditions were based on small changes in message characteristics. In the next chapter, I look to see whether priming will be evident on an issue that people have had more recent experience with and that goes beyond the economy. Additionally, the differences between conditions are less subtle and are based on differences in news frames.

## Chapter 4 Priming in Health Care News

In the previous chapter, the issue of inflation was investigated to see whether temporal and social distance could make the self or collective more salient and prime presidential and policy evaluations. Findings were somewhat more complicated than hypothesized. First, there were very few instances of priming until audience characteristics were taken into account. There were also few findings for the temporal distance treatments overall, although the social distance treatments were more successful. For the social distance treatments, the only real-world experience variable that mattered was income. Neither party identification nor interest made a difference. On the other hand, knowledge clearly moderated, with high knowledge individuals showing the strongest priming effects, as hypothesized. However, it is important to note that the societal condition was not very successful in strengthening the relationship between national perceptions and national evaluations, although the individual condition strengthened the relationship between personal perceptions and national evaluations among both those with high income and those who were knowledgeable about the economy.

This chapter examines more closely how social distance may prime personal or national perceptions in political evaluations. In part, it does this by moving beyond the economy to another issue: health care reform. Outside of economic issues, news can both shape personal and collective concerns about social problems (Mutz, 1998; Tyler, 1980).

The news can also prime non-economic problems, such as foreign policy in presidential evaluations (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder, 1997; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). Likewise, concerns about non-economic issues that are collective problems (Darke & Chaiken, 2005; Joslyn & Haider-Markel, 2007) or issues that relate to simple self-interest (e.g., Chong, Citrin, & Conley, 2001; Joslyn & Haider-Markel, 2007; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980) factor into policy evaluations.

This chapter also more closely examines how social distance may prime personal or national perceptions in political evaluations by focusing on an issue that received heavy coverage in the news, but is also a national issue that people experience personally. This chapter focuses on the health care reform debate of 2009 and 2010 because it was a prominent debate and because most adults have experience with the health care system. The way in which the health care system is structured can influence individuals' access to quality health care—affecting people personally—and it can also be an issue of national concern in terms of fairness, equity, and the role of government.

### **Hypotheses**

Using the same logic as the previous chapter, I outline the hypotheses below.

First, I hypothesize that the framed conditions should increase the salience of prospections in presidential and policy evaluations.

H1: Among those in the individual (societal) group, there should be a stronger relationship between perceptions about health care improving personally (nationally) and supporting the president and health care policy than among those in the societal (individual) and control groups.

However, it could be that for those with real-world experience, the conditions will have the strongest effect on the salience of prospections on political evaluations. In this case, individuals may be more sensitive to changes in health care policy if they are uninsured or if they have recently experienced major problems with their insurance. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Among those who have real-world experience with health care issues (based on having insurance problems) and are in the individual (societal) group, there should be a stronger relationship between perceptions about personal (national) health care improving and supporting the president and health care policy than among those in the societal (individual) and control groups.

Next, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the most knowledgeable saw the strongest effect of personal prospections on presidential approval. However, this could have been the case because the issue was more novel to respondents. However, the health care reform debate of 2009-2010 should not be. It is likely that both the knowledgeable and less knowledgeable alike should be aware of the issue. However, the less knowledgeable may be more susceptible to the priming effect in this case, as research demonstrates that less novel information tends to be primed among the less knowledgeable (e.g., McGraw & Ling, 2003; Druckman & Holmes, 2004). One explanation for this is because the least knowledgeable are more likely to rely on the most recently activated information when forming political judgments than those with more knowledge (McGraw & Pinney, 1990). Therefore, it is likely that among the less interested and the less knowledgeable, the conditions will more strongly moderate the relationship between personal and national prospections on political evaluations. In other

words, those who are less knowledgeable about politics may be more susceptible to these effects, as may those who are less interested.

H3a: Compared to those who are more interested in politics, among those who are less interested in politics and are in the individual (societal) group, there should be a stronger relationship between perceptions about personal (national) health care improving and supporting the president and health care policy than among those in the societal (individual) and control groups.

H3b: Compared to those who are more knowledgeable about politics, those who are less knowledgeable about politics and are in the individual (societal) group, there should be a stronger relationship between perceptions about personal (national) health care improving and supporting the president and health care policy than among those in the societal (individual) and control groups.

Finally, as in the previous chapter, I investigate party identification. However, unlike the previous chapter, changes in health care policy had recently been subject to a highly visible and divisive partisan debate. While the tone of the message may resonate with Democrats, Republicans would likely find that it conflicted with their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes on health care. However, also in line with the reasoning in the previous chapter, it is often independents that are the most affected by political information. In this case, this may be especially true for the health care debate because independents would not have been able to fall as easily along the partisan lines that were drawn in the debate.

H4: Compared to Democrats and Republicans, priming effects should be most evident among independents.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **Overview**

To test the hypotheses in this chapter, another experiment was used, although this experiment focused on health care. Before this experiment was conducted, two pilot studies were run using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website to check the manipulation and evaluate potential questions for the main study. Because the pilot studies suggested that the stimuli were working correctly—generating either thoughts about the self or about the country—and did not seem to be affecting variables that could potentially be confounds, the main study moved forward using the same experimental stimuli. A third pilot study was conducted using MTurk to ascertain how the potential control article would be perceived.

The experiment in this chapter relied on a randomized posttest only design with two treatment groups and a control group. In this experiment, the two treatment groups were based on a manipulation of individual and societal frames in a newspaper article on health care, and the control group received an article focused on an unrelated topic without the treatment variable. The data collection proceeded in the same manner as the experiment in the previous chapter relying on national online panels recruited by YouGov Polimetrix.

### **Background**

The stimuli in this chapter focused on health care reform, specifically the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), also called Healthcare Reform, the

Affordable Care Act, and Obamacare. The PPACA was signed into law on March 20, 2010. The national debate leading up to the bill was characterized by intense elite conflict along partisan lines. Shapiro and Jacobs (2010) argue that elite messages were crafted to alarm citizens. As examples, Shapiro and Jacobs cite warnings provided by some Republicans and conservatives of “death panels” and a “government takeover” of the employer-based system. Likewise, they argued that Democrats created messages warning of the risks of inaction and demonizing insurers. Responses to the debate were emotional with crowded town hall meetings and fear that emotionally-laden rumors about the bill were true (Cohen, 2009). In terms of public opinion about the bill, between early 2009 until just before the passage of the bill in March 2010, the percentage of survey respondents who thought that the reforms would make them or their families worse off nearly tripled, as did perceptions that the country would be worse off (Shapiro & Jacobs, 2010). By the time that the pilot studies were conducted, however, the debate had been concluded for a year and some of the changes set by the bill had gone into effect or were about to go into effect (e.g., the high risk pool for people with pre-existing conditions) although it is likely that the reforms had not been felt by most of the public or study samples.

### **The Experimental Manipulation**

An experiment was conducted to test the hypotheses. It used the same manipulations as the pilots, but had 3 cells: individual, societal, and a control. For full wordings of the conditions, see Appendix B.

The stimuli were designed to resemble newspaper coverage in the form of an informational sidebar or op-ed or as an online in depth report or info-graphic. They were constructed by combining actual newspaper coverage from several sources as well as press release information from the Kaiser Family Foundation. Two conditions were created: individual and societal. Creating the manipulation was accomplished two ways. First, paragraphs were matched between the two conditions based on the aspect of health care being discussed. For example, costs to the individual were matched with costs to the country. They were then revised to generate similar wording between the two versions. Although the topic and wording was similar, the content reflected actual differences in subject matter, such as costs, and in this way resembled typical media framing manipulations (Iyengar, 1991; Vraga, Carr, Nytes & Shah, 2010; c.f. Druckman, 2004). Next, the individual condition used the pronoun “you” while the societal condition referred to “the country” and “Americans” in place of “you.” Because differences between the two versions went beyond mere changes in wording and also involved content differences, a pilot study was necessary to check the similarity and differences across the two conditions—in other words, a manipulation check.

Pilot studies confirmed that the articles were rated similarly on how interesting the articles were, content about minorities, positive and negative content, how complicated the content was, the effect of health care on the country, content related to the Republican Party, content related to the Democratic Party, government focus, and length, except that the individually framed article was perceived as marginally more important and marginally more likely to affect the participant personally than the societal article. A second pilot confirmed with a thought listing procedure that the societal



condition elicited a greater rate of societal thoughts than the individual condition, while the individual condition elicited a greater rate of self-focused thoughts than the societal condition. The control article was about the discovery of a new species and was designed to be similar in tone and length to the treatment conditions. Although it was piloted on a different sample, it was similar on these characteristics.

### **Recruitment and Respondents**

Respondents were surveyed by the research firm YouGov Polimetrix, sampling from their existing survey panel from October 28-31, 2011. The surveys were self-administered online. Respondents were awarded “PollingPoints,” exchangeable for small gifts, for participating. Recruitment procedures for this chapter were the same as in Chapter 3, where more details about the recruitment method can be found.

Like the previous experiment, this one also tested whether respondents had attended to the treatment that they had been assigned. Multiple choice questions as well a question asking respondents to check items corresponding to facts that had appeared in in the story they read were asked. Together, the treatment respondents could have scored up to 8 points on these content recognition questions, while the control group could have scored up to 7 points correctly. In all three groups, having four or fewer questions correct was seen as a sign of inattention and these respondents were dropped from the final sample. The resulting study had a total of 446 participants, which was 89% of the original sample size.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> With the weight on, this was a total of N=443 responses. Weights in the final sample ranged from .71 to 1.54.

## **Procedures**

Participants initially read one of the three versions of the newspaper article. These were randomly assigned. Next, immediately after reading the story, participants were asked to list their thoughts using the procedure described in Appendix C, although they were not asked to rate their thoughts until after all of the closed ended questions related to presidential approval, the articles, and health care were asked. After listing their thoughts, they were asked about their approval of the job Barack Obama had been doing, both generally and on health care, and their approval on a series of questions on health care policy and the new health care law. Next, they were asked questions about the content of the article they read to gauge their attention to the experimental treatments. Then, they were asked their prospective evaluations about health care. This was followed by batteries of additional questions, the thought-rating procedure, and finally they provided demographic information. Respondents were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

## **Random Assignment and Manipulation Check**

First, I checked to see whether the random assignment had worked as planned. There were no significant differences between groups for gender, race, education, age, or income.<sup>29</sup> Only one test was close to being significant: the results for the party identification. The chi-square test was performed for the 7-point party identification scale across the three conditions,  $X^2(12, N = 444) = 17.36, p = .136$ . A Kruskal-Wallis test was also conducted, which does not require normality, and the chi-square was  $X^2(2, N =$

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<sup>29</sup> Age and Income were tested using ANOVA, while the other variables were tested using chi-square.

444) = 6.39,  $p = .04$ . The chi-square results for party identification using the three point scale was  $X^2(4, N = 444) = 8.15, p = .086$ . Because of the outcome of these tests, all results from this chapter will be reported based on equations using party identification and the variables listed in this paragraph above as controls.

To see whether the manipulation worked correctly on the final set of respondents from YouGov Polimetrix, I retained the open ended question and self-coding procedure that was used in the pilot studies.<sup>30</sup> I summed the total number of responses that respondents indicated that were about themselves or their families and separately summed the number of responses respondents indicated were about the country. Each of these was divided by the total number of relevant responses (a sum of self- and country-relevant thoughts) to give a personal-to-total relevant thoughts ratio and a national-to-total relevant thoughts ratio. If there were direct effects from the framing, we would expect to see that the individual framing condition should increase the rate of personal or self-relevant thoughts while the societal framing condition should increase the rate of national or other-directed thoughts. Regression analyses controlling for party identification, age, education, race, income, and gender indicated that those in the individual framing condition had a higher rate of personal level thoughts than those in societal group ( $b = .21, se = .05, p < .0001$ ). Additionally, those in control group did not have a higher rate of personal thoughts than those in the societal group ( $b = -.01, se = .05, p = .89$ ), indicating that the control group and societal group did not differ in their personal thought rate. Likewise, a regression testing whether the societal condition produced a higher rate of national thoughts found this was indeed the case; the societal group

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<sup>30</sup> In this version, however, respondents were additionally allowed to select “this was about the way the article was written” to further distinguish the relevant from irrelevant thoughts.

produced significantly higher rate of national thoughts than the individual group ( $b=.21$ ,  $se=.05$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). In this case the control group also had a higher rate of national thoughts than the individual group ( $b=.22$ ,  $se=.05$ ,  $p<.0001$ ).<sup>31</sup> These results confirm that the framing conditions had a direct effect on whether individuals thought more about themselves or about the country (or impersonal others), in the appropriate directions, confirming that the manipulations had the intended effect. Moreover, it should be noted that the societal and control groups appear to be acting the same way because there was no difference between the societal and control group on the number of personal thoughts elicited, and both groups had similarly high rates of national thoughts relative to the individual group; on the other hand, the individual group appears to be acting differently from both the control and societal group.

## **Measures**

This study used two sets of criterion variables, presidential approval and policy support. It also used two predictor variables, personal and national prospections about health care, i.e., whether health care would get better or worse for respondents personally or for others across the country. Moderating variables were the experimental conditions—the individual frame, the societal frame, and the control group.

### **Criterion variables.**

*Presidential approval.* Respondents were asked: “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as president?” This question

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<sup>31</sup> Rerunning the regression with the societal frame as the excluded group indicate that the control group was no different from the societal group in terms of the rate of national thoughts ( $b=.01$ ,  $se=.05$ ,  $p=.885$ ).

had a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly approve* to *strongly disapprove*. Responses were recoded to run from 0 = *strongly disapprove* to 1 = *strongly approve* ( $M = .430$ ,  $SD = .369$ ).

***Presidential health care approval.*** Respondents were asked, “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama has handled the issue of health care reform?” The same 7-point scale as the Presidential Approval variable was used, which was also recoded to run from 0 = *strongly disapprove* to 1 = *strongly approve* ( $M = .421$ ,  $SD = .360$ ).

***Policy support.*** This question asked respondents, “Now, consider the health reform bill that was signed into law early last year. Would you say that you have a generally unfavorable or generally favorable opinion of it?” A follow up question asked, “Is that very [favorable/unfavorable] or somewhat [favorable/unfavorable]?” The frequencies for this variable were: 12.5% were *very favorable*, 34.7% were *somewhat favorable*, 17.7% were *somewhat unfavorable*, and 35.1% were *very unfavorable* towards the law. Because a limited number of respondents fell into two of the categories, the variable was dichotomized so that 0 = *unfavorable opinion* and 1 = *favorable opinion*. A total of 47% of respondents had a favorable opinion (or supported) the law.

#### **Predictor variables.**

***Personal health care projections.*** Respondents were asked two questions, both on 9-point scales. They were first asked, “Next, we would like to know what you think will happen in the next year. How much more or less expensive will each of these become? Two questions appeared in random order, with one reading, “Health care or health insurance costs for you and your family.” The scale ranged from *much more*

*expensive to much less expensive.* A second question asked “How much harder or easier will each of these become?” Respondents were randomly presented with four questions, one of which read, “The ability to get health insurance or keep the health insurance you (and your family) already have.” The scale ranged from *much harder* to *much easier*. The answer to these two questions were averaged and recoded to run from 0 = *will get worse* to 1 = *will get better* (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .73$ ,  $M = .39$ ,  $SD = .22$ ).

***National health care prospections.*** Following the same procedure and using the same question stems as the personal prospections measure, respondents were asked, “How much more or less expensive will these become . . . health care costs for the country” and “How much harder or easier will these become . . . The ability for people across the country to get health insurance or keep the health insurance they already have?” The answer to these two questions were averaged and recoded to run from 0 = *will get worse* to 1 = *will get better* (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .77$ ,  $M = .40$ ,  $SD = .25$ ).

#### **Control and moderating variables.**

Gender, race, education, age, income, and party identification were used as control variables. In addition, a dummy coded version of party identification, as well as knowledge, interest, and health insurance problems (real-world experience) were moderating variables.

***Party identification.*** Respondents were asked a branching question about their party identification. It read: “Generally speaking, so you think of yourself as a . . .? Democrat, Republican, Independent, Other (please specify), Not Sure.” For those selecting either party, the follow up question asked, “Would you call yourself a STRONG [Democrat/Republican] or a NOT VERY STRONG [Democrat/Republican]?” while

those selecting *independent, other, or not sure* were asked, “Do you think of yourself as CLOSER to the Republican Party or Democratic Party?” The resulting variable was recoded so that people were not sure of their party identification were considered independents. The 7-point version of the variable was used as a control, coded from 0 = *strong Democrat* to 1 = *strong Republican* ( $M = .43$   $SD = .35$ ). The variable was also dummy coded, which was used to investigate moderating effects, where variables represented Democrats and Republicans, and independents were the excluded category. Democrats were 50% of the dataset, Independents 16.3%, and Republicans 33.7%.

***Real-world experience.*** Experiencing problems with insurance was considered a real-world condition. Respondents were asked whether they currently had health insurance (answers were yes, no [19.2%]) and whether “In the past year have you or anyone in your family lost their health insurance or had trouble finding health insurance?” to which they could also answer yes (18%) or no. Responses were summed and dichotomized so that people could have either had no problems with insurance and were currently insured (coded as 0) or either lacked or had problems with insurance (coded as 1) (phi correlation = .29, 29% lost insurance or were uninsured in the last year).

***Income.*** Respondents were asked, “What is your combined annual household income?” From which there were 12 ranges to choose from, running from *Less than 30,000* to *250,000 or more*. The high endpoint was set to \$250,000 or more since taxes would be an issue for people at this income level, although only 4 respondents in the sample fell into this category. This variable was recoded to run from 0 to 1 ( $M = .30$ ,  $SD = .28$ ).

**Political Interest.** This question asked respondents, “How interested would you say you are in politics?” Respondents could answer, “Extremely interested, Very interested, Moderately interested, Slightly interested, Not at all interested.” This question was recoded to run from 0 = *not at all interested* to 1 = *extremely interested* ( $M = .63$ ,  $SD = .32$ ).

**Political Knowledge.** A total of five open-ended questions were asked about current events. Each question was timed, and the direction prompt for the question read: “Now, we would like to find out how much you know off hand about current events. Without asking anyone or looking up the answers, for the next set of questions, please write your best guess in the spaces below. Many people don’t know the answers to these questions, but we’d be grateful if you would please answer every question, even if you’re not sure what the right answer is. You will have 30 seconds to answer each question after it appears on the screen. After 30 seconds, the screen will automatically go on to the next question. If you finish answering a question before the 30 seconds are up, you can go to the next question by clicking on the forward arrow.” The questions were: “Do you happen to know, who is the current British Prime Minister?” “As far as you know, what is the current unemployment rate in the United States – that is, of the adults in the United States who want to work, what percent of them would you guess are now unemployed and looking for a job?” “What job does Hillary Clinton currently hold?” “Which party currently has a majority in the House of Representatives?” “What U.S. government position does John Roberts currently hold?” Scoring of these questions was fairly lenient. Correct answers were as follows: Cameron, 9-9.9%, Secretary of State, Republicans, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (which also included those answering merely that he



was on the Supreme Court). The knowledge index was created by summing whether or not people chose the correct answers to these questions, and ranged from 0 to 5 correct answers. Fourteen percent of the sample did not get any correct answers, and 8% got all five questions correct. The mean number of correct answers was 2.41,  $SD = 1.51$  (Kuder-Richardson coefficient = .69). This variable was recoded to range from 0 to 1.

Several demographic variables were used in all analyses as control variables. This included age, based on subtracting answers to the question “In what year were you born” from the current year (range 18-90,  $M = 46.6$ ,  $SD = 15.78$ ), gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*, 50.8% were female), race or ethnicity (0 = *white*, 1 = *non-white*, 28.3% were non-white), and education. Education was assessed by asking respondents “What is the highest level of education you have completed?” where responses were, “Did not graduate from high school,” “High school graduate,” “Some college, but no degree (yet),” “2-year college degree,” “4-year college degree,” and “Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)” The options for 2-year degree and some college were combined to create a 5-point scale ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). The 5-point scale was recoded to run from 0 to 1. Age was also recoded to run from 0 to 1.

## Results

To investigate the hypotheses, analyses were conducted using OLS regression, and in the case of policy support, logistic regression. All analyses were conducted with the given population weights.<sup>32</sup> For all interactive analyses, multiplicative interaction

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<sup>32</sup> There were only a few instances of small differences in significance level when the analyses were conducted with the weights off; however, the overall pattern of findings did not change. Therefore, weights

terms were used. To lessen the potential for multicollinearity and for ease of interpretation, (non-dummy) component variables in the multiplicative interaction terms and control variables were mean-centered (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Jaccard & Turrisi, 2003). Significant interactive relationships are presented as figures. Figures are based on predictions made from the regression line, where the parameters of interest are held at one standard deviation above and below the mean and other predictors are held at their means.

First, looking among control group respondents only, regression results indicate that there is a significant relationship between national prospections and presidential approval ( $b = .53$ ,  $se = .15$ ,  $p = .001$ ) such that the more one sees health care for the country improving over the course of the next year, the more likely one is to support Obama. Likewise, the more one sees health care for the country as getting better, the more likely one is to support Obama on health care reform ( $b = .57$ ,  $se = .17$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and to have a supportive opinion of the health care law ( $b = 6.67$ ,  $se b = 2.44$ ,  $e^B = 789.09$ ,  $p = .006$ ).<sup>33 34</sup> These results are consistent with findings from the sociotropic politics literature since they show that national prospections have a stronger effect on presidential

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were used in all analyses. Weights were used to help make the sample more representative of the population, despite dropping the inattentive respondents.

<sup>33</sup> Party identification was also a significant predictor of support of the health care law. The more strongly respondents identified with the Democratic Party, the more likely they were to support the health reform law ( $B = -2.048$ ,  $SE B = .783$ ,  $e^B = .129$ ,  $p = .009$ ). Consistent with the symbolic politics perspective, party identification was a stronger predictor of policy support than income (which was not significant,  $B = -.069$ ,  $SE B = 1.04$ ,  $e^B = .933$ ,  $p = .947$ ), where those with lower incomes could be considered to have a vested interest in the policy.

<sup>34</sup> Among the full group ( $n=425$ ), both personal prospections ( $b = .31$ ,  $se = .11$ ,  $p = .004$ ) and national prospections ( $b = .28$ ,  $se = .10$ ,  $p = .003$ ) are positively related to presidential approval. Personal prospections are also positively related to presidential approval on health care ( $b = .25$ ,  $se = .10$ ,  $p = .017$ ), as are national prospections ( $b = .37$ ,  $se = .10$ ,  $p = .0001$ ). However, only national prospections and not personal prospections are significant in predicting policy support ( $B = 5.281$ ,  $SE B = 1.22$ ,  $e^B = 196.52$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

(and policy support) than personal propections do (none of which were significant across the three regressions conducted among the control group).<sup>35</sup>

Next, to test H1, a series of regressions were run to look among each experimental group for the relationship between personal propections and presidential and policy approval and between national propections and presidential and policy approval. Results, which can be found in Table 4.1, indicate that the conditions were not able to differentiate the salience of either personal propections or national propections in presidential or policy evaluations. These show that H1 was not supported.

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<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the effects of personal propections are slightly understated in these models (and others in this chapter). The correlation between personal and national propections is  $r(431) = .86, p < .001$ . This correlation raises some concerns about multicollinearity in the models. One way to get around these problems would have been to use 2-stage least squares; however, this approach relies on making assumptions about the data, and would also have made it difficult to assess attitude change or salience as it relates to the treatment content. Therefore, I looked at the collinearity statistics. In most cases using the full sample (without interaction terms), the tolerance for personal and national propections stays above .2 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) stays below 5. Although the VIFs are slightly high, they are not near the cutoff of 10 that has been proposed for VIF (and the tolerances are higher than the cutoff proposed for tolerances, which is close to 0).

Table 4.1 Predicting Presidential and Policy Approval Variables with National and Personal Prospections, by Social Condition.

	Presidential Approval <sup>a</sup>		Presidential Health Care Approval <sup>a</sup>		Health Care Law Approval <sup>b</sup>	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Individual Group	-.02 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.49 (.35)	.48 (.35)
Control Group	.08** (.03)	.08** (.03)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.53 (.35)	.52 (.35)
National Prospections (Centered)	.31** (.10)	.31** (.11)	.39*** (.10)	.39** (.11)	5.32*** (1.25)	5.17** (1.54)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.29* (.14)	.30** (.12)	.24# (.14)	.25* (.11)	2.19 (2.01)	1.81 (1.33)
Prospections x individual	-.05 (.14)	-.11 (.12)	.02 (.14)	-.05 (.12)	-.44 (2.32)	.08 (2.03)
Prospections x control	.09 (.13)	.11 (.11)	-.01 (.13)	.01 (.11)	-.47 (2.18)	.58 (1.93)
<i>N</i>	426	426	426	426	424	425
R <sup>2</sup> / Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.60	.60	.58	.58	.62	.62
Log Likelihood					321.18	321.13

Notes: a. Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses.

b. Entries are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses.

Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1, personal and national prospections are mean-centered. Control variables included in the analyses are age, gender (female), party identification, education, race (non-white), and income; continuous variables are mean-centered. #*p*<.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01; \*\*\**p*<0.001.

However, it is possible that among different types of citizens, the relationship between prospections and evaluations does become stronger depending upon which condition they were in. The relationships may become clearer if moderating variables are considered, as hypothesized above. Therefore, the next set of analyses examined whether the conditions strengthened the relationships between personal and national prospections

and presidential and policy approval by real-world conditions, which included problems with health care coverage. This test of H2 showed that there were no significant differences between those with and without health care problems; H2 was not supported.

Next, it was hypothesized that political interest (H3a) and knowledge (H3b) would moderate priming effects. Table 4.2 shows the regression results where political interest is used as the moderating variable. There are differences between how salient prospections are for presidential approval between the Individual and Societal Groups based on levels of political interest ( $b = -1.55, -1.06, -1.26, p < .01$ , and  $-.84, p < .05$ ). A series of figures (4.1 - 4.4) depict the significant relationships from Table 4.2. Both Figure 4.1 and 4.2 show that the expected priming effect occurred among the disinterested as hypothesized. Panel B of Figures 4.1 and 4.2 shows the expected effect for the individually framed condition. Among the disinterested, the individual frame increased the relationship between personal health care prospections and presidential approval relative to the other conditions. However, among the disinterested, there is a negative relationship between personal health care prospections and presidential approval for those in the societal group. This means that the more the politically disinterested in the societal group thought that health care would get better for them personally, the more they disapproved of the president.

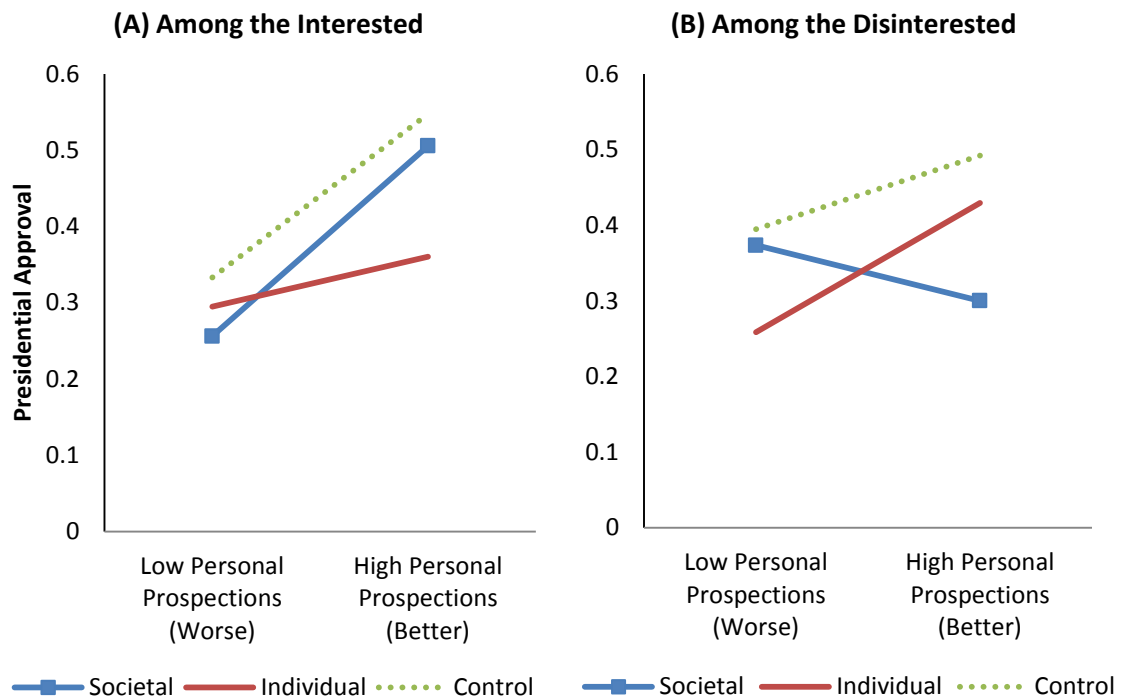
Table 4.2 Predicting Presidential and Policy Approval Variables with National and Personal Prospections, by Condition and Political Interest.

	Presidential Approval <sup>a</sup>		Presidential Health Care Approval <sup>a</sup>		Health Care Law Approval <sup>b</sup>	
	Personal	National	Personal	National	Personal	National
Individual Group	-.02 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.42 (.37)	.406 (.38)
Control Group	.08** (.03)	.09** (.03)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.55 (.36)	.54 (.36)
National Prospections (Centered)	.31** (.10)	.28* (.11)	.40*** (.10)	.40*** (.11)	5.72*** (1.34)	5.22** (1.66)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.20 (.14)	.26* (.10)	.17 (.14)	.20# (.11)	1.57 (2.08)	1.30 (1.41)
Political Interest (Centered)	.07 (.07)	.06 (.07)	.06 (.07)	.06 (.07)	2.32* (.93)	2.25* (.92)
Prospections x Interest	1.16*** (.31)	.95*** (.25)	.99** (.31)	.74** (.25)	-2.24 (5.85)	1.12 (4.89)
Prospections x Individual	.07 (.14)	-.03 (.12)	.09 (.14)	-.01 (.12)	-.41 (2.38)	.57 (2.17)
Prospections x Control	.15 (.14)	.15 (.12)	.05 (.14)	.02 (.12)	.09 (2.25)	1.23 (1.99)
Individual x Interest	-.10 (.09)	-.10 (.09)	-.15 (.09)	-.15 (.09)	-3.16* (1.22)	-3.28** (1.20)
Control x Interest	-.08 (.09)	-.07 (.09)	-.00 (.09)	.01 (.09)	-2.02 (1.24)	-2.04# (1.23)
Prospections x Individual Interest	-1.55*** (.44)	-1.06** (.38)	-1.26** (.44)	-.84* (.38)	-3.65 (7.84)	1.14 (6.79)
Prospections x Control x Interest	-.74# (.42)	-.71# (.36)	-.68 (.41)	-.42 (.36)	-3.65 (7.76)	-5.68 (7.03)
<i>N</i>	425	425	425	425	423	422
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> / Nagelkerke <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.617	.616	.596	.594	.640	.639
Log Likelihood					308.45	309.14

Notes: a. Entries are OLS coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. b. Entries are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. Dependent variables are coded 0 to 1. Control variables included are age, gender (female), party identification, education, race (non-white), and income; continuous variables are mean-centered. #*p*<.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01; \*\*\**p*<0.001.

Perhaps this surprising finding shows that some sort of counterarguing or disassociation occurs among the disinterested in the societal group such that they think that health care improving for society is independent of what happens to them and that they their own circumstances are improving despite what the president does. However, this explanation does not quite seem to explain what it is about the societal manipulation that would be having this effect among this group, especially when there is a positive relationship for the disinterested when they are in the control group.

Figure 4.1 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Political Interest and Condition.

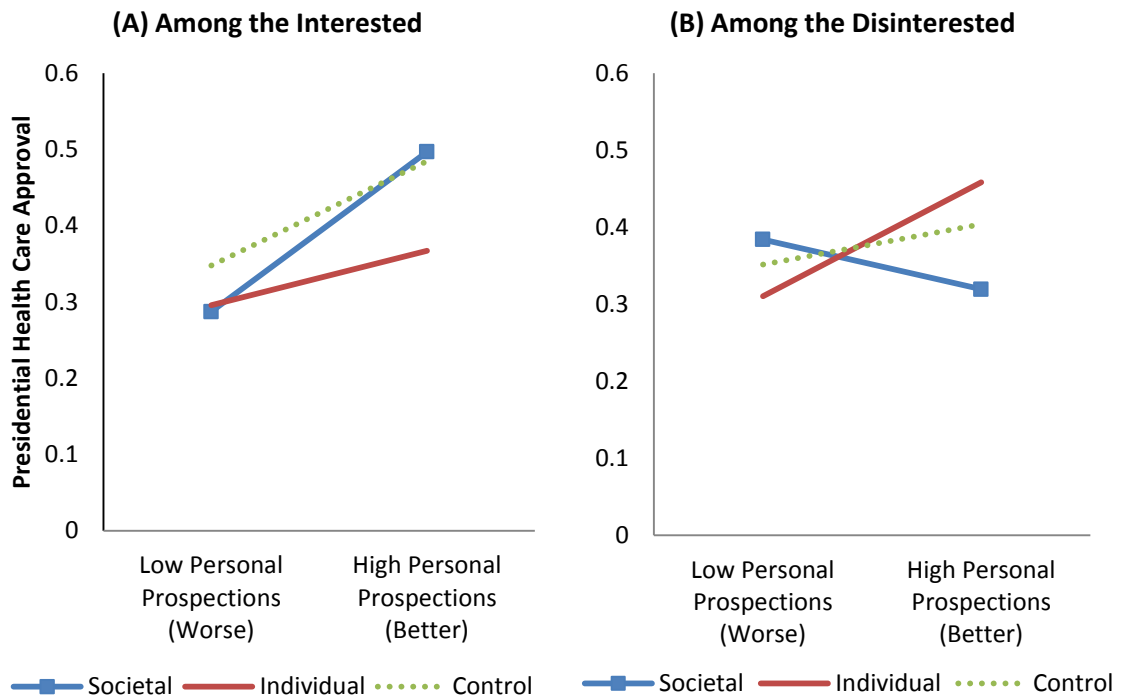


Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential approval. Low personal prospects are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospects are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospects. Interest and disinterest are at one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Control variables are centered at the mean.

Now, turning to the politically interested respondents in Panel A of both Figures 4.1 and 4.2 shows that among the politically interested (in panel A), the societal frame strengthened the relationship between personal prospections about health care and presidential approval more strongly than did the individual frame. This finding is somewhat surprising, since the individual frame placed more emphasis on the relationship of the health care law to the individual reader than the societal frame. The other surprising finding is that among the interested the societal manipulation actually helps the interested link their personal prospections to presidential approval more strongly than the individual manipulation. Perhaps the interested think more about how their personal circumstances link to the president's health care policy in the societal condition while the less interested are unable to see how their personal perspectives on health care should relate unless they are told by the individual condition. In other words, a different process could be at play where the interested are reminded by the societal condition about how they are linked to the president, while the disinterested would not have as firm of a basis to be reminded and learn that a link can be made from the individual condition.



Figure 4.2 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Health Care Approval, by Political Interest and Condition.

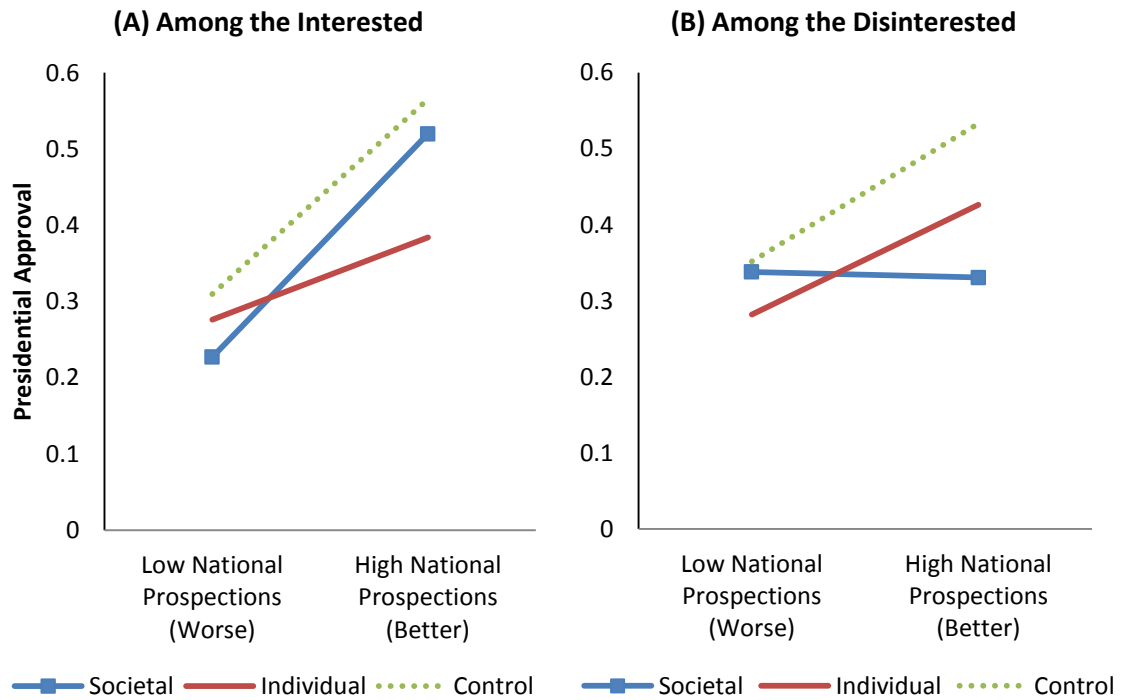


Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential health care approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Interest and disinterest are at one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Control variables are centered at the mean.

However, Figures 4.3 and 4.4 show the same pattern of results, except for national prospections. Now the relationship is the opposite of expectations; the interested, depicted in Panel A, are eliciting the predicted priming effect. Among the interested, the societal frame has a stronger relationship between health care prospections about the country and presidential approval relative to the individual frame. Among the disinterested, depicted in panel B, the finding is reversed—the individual condition increases the strength of national prospections on health care and presidential approval relative to the societal group. The pattern of findings in Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 is the

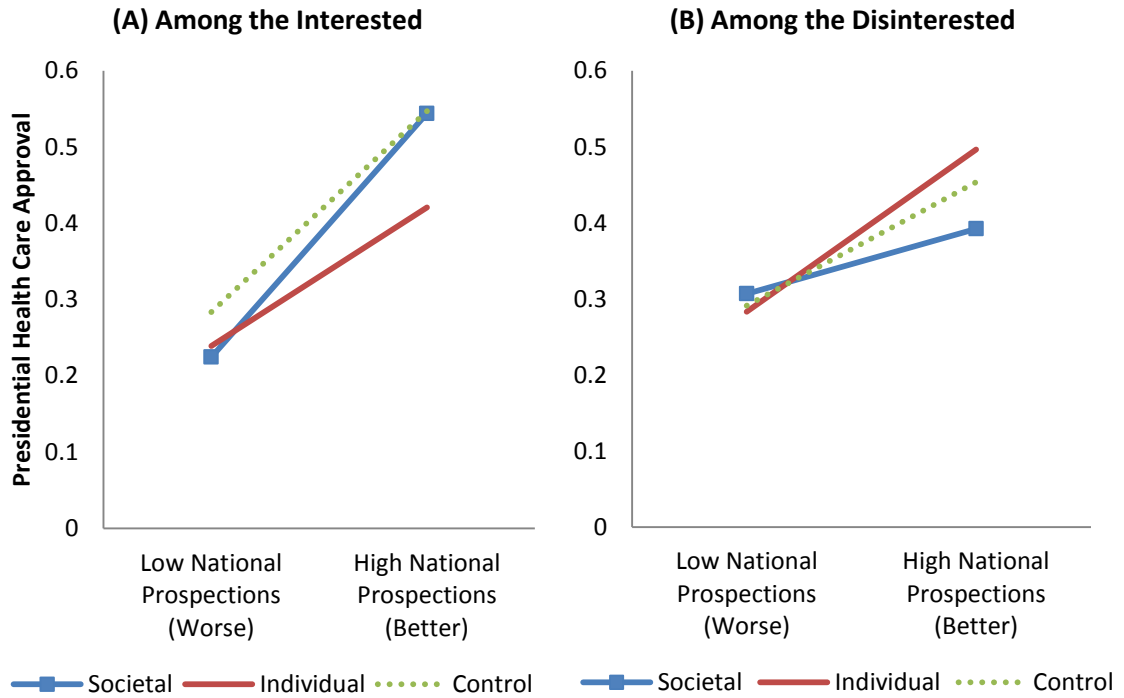
same as in Figure 4.3 and 4.4 respectively, showing that the relationships are the same across both presidential approval generally and presidential approval on health care specifically. Taken together, the figures indicate that for the interested, the societal group primed both types of prospections in subsequent presidential evaluations while among the less interested, the individual group primed both types of prospections in subsequent presidential evaluations. It seems that the most likely explanation is that the societal frame resonated more for the interested, strengthening the relationship of both personal and national prospections for presidential approval, while the individual frame resonated more for the disinterest, perhaps for the reasons described above, except that the respective frames helped individuals link both personal and national prospections to presidential approval.

Figure 4.3 The Relationship between National Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Political Interest and Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential approval. Low national prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high national prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for national prospections. Interest and disinterest are at one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Control variables are centered at the mean.

Figure 4.4 The Relationship between National Prospections and Presidential Health Care Approval, by Political Interest and Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential health care approval. Low national inspections are one standard deviation below the mean and high national inspections are one standard deviation above the mean for national inspections. Interest and disinterest are at one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Control variables are centered at the mean.

In addition to hypothesizing for H3a that political interest would moderate, it was also hypothesized in H3b that political knowledge would as well. Table 4.3 shows the results for the moderating relationships of political knowledge. Columns one and three show that there are significant moderating relationships for personal inspections, which are depicted in Figures 4.5 and 4.6. These figures show that knowledge has the same pattern of results as political interest; the individual condition primed personal

prospections on presidential approval for the less knowledgeable (relative to the societal condition only), while the societal condition primed personal prospections on presidential approval for the knowledgeable.

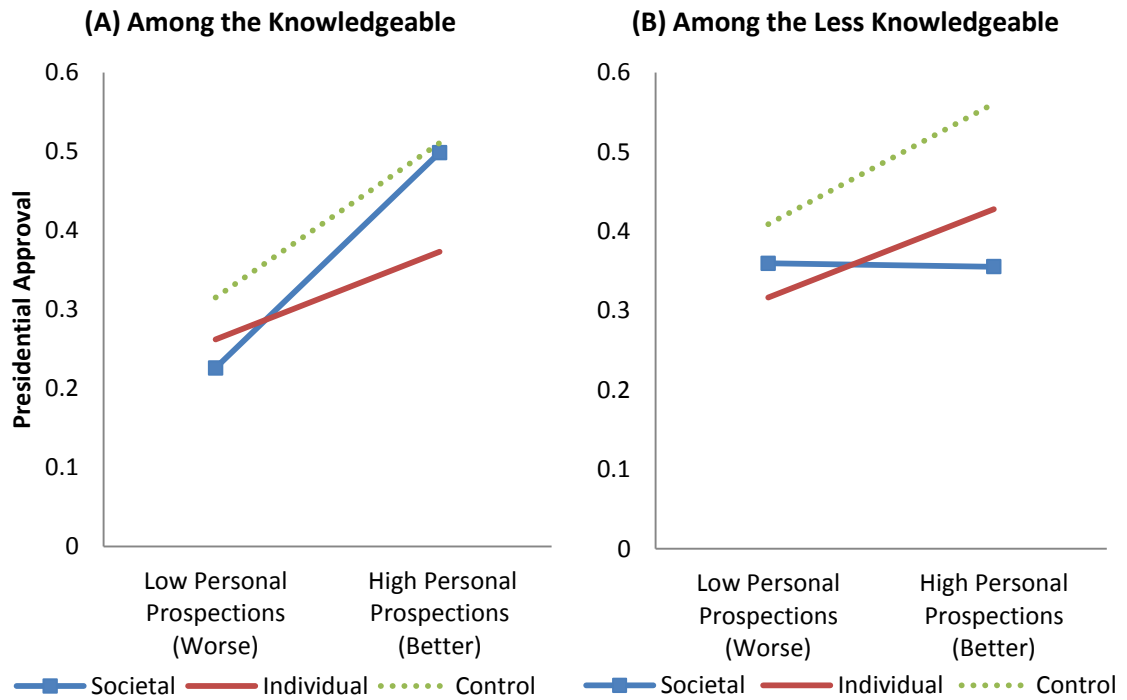
For findings for both knowledge and interest, it appears that people did not make much of a distinction between personal and national prospections, so perhaps the knowledgeable and interested were imputing their personal prospections from their national ones while the less knowledgeable and interested were projecting from their personal ones onto the national ones. However, taken together, the third hypothesis (H3a and H3b) was only partially supported. In terms of personal prospections, the least interested and knowledgeable appeared to have personal prospections made more salient in the individual condition, while national prospections also appeared more salient for them in the individual condition. On the other hand, the most interested had national prospections made more salient for them in the societal condition, and the most knowledgeable and interested had personal prospections made more salient for them in the societal condition as well

Table 4.3 Predicting Presidential and Policy Approval Variables with National and Personal Prospections, by Condition and Political Knowledge.

	Presidential Approval <sup>a</sup>		Presidential Health Care Approval <sup>a</sup>		Health Care Law Approval <sup>b</sup>	
	Pers	Nat'l	Pers	Nat'l	Pers	Nat'l
Individual Group	-.02 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.00 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.17 (.42)	.19 (.42)
Control Group	.09** (.03)	.10** (.03)	.03 (.03)	.04 (.03)	.43 (.37)	.47 (.38)
National Prospections (Centered)	.30** (.10)	.28* (.11)	.37*** (.10)	.38** (.11)	5.16** (1.33)	5.66** (1.82)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.31* (.14)	.31** (.11)	.27# (.14)	.24* (.10)	3.67 (2.32)	1.47 (1.37)
Political Knowledge (Centered)	.01 (.08)	.01 (.08)	.02 (.08)	.02 (.08)	1.52 (1.04)	1.69# (1.00)
Prospections x Knowledge	1.04** (.37)	.78** (.28)	1.21** (.37)	.82** (.28)	14.12* (6.75)	8.81# (5.03)
Prospections x Individual	-.05 (.14)	-.08 (.12)	-.00 (.14)	-.04 (.12)	.09 (3.12)	1.19 (2.64)
Prospections x Control	.09 (.14)	.14 (.12)	.013 (.14)	.05 (.12)	-1.44 (2.54)	.92 (1.30)
Individual x Knowledge	-.10 (.10)	-.10 (.10)	-.15 (.10)	-.16 (.10)	-3.25* (1.32)	-3.36* (1.30)
Control x Knowledge	-.13 (.10)	-.13 (.10)	-.06 (.10)	-.06 (.10)	-.87 (1.29)	-.96 (1.28)
Prospections x Individual x Knowledge	-1.04* (.47)	-.57 (.40)	-.96* (.47)	-.26 (.40)	-1.69 (9.85)	.02 (8.25)
Prospections x Control x Knowledge	-.88# (.49)	-.71# (.40)	-1.29** (.49)	-.78# (.40)	-19.30* (8.46)	-12.50# (7.02)
<i>N</i>	426	426	426	426	424	424
R <sup>2</sup> / Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.612	.615	.596	.598	.65	.65
Log Likelihood					302.09	305.12

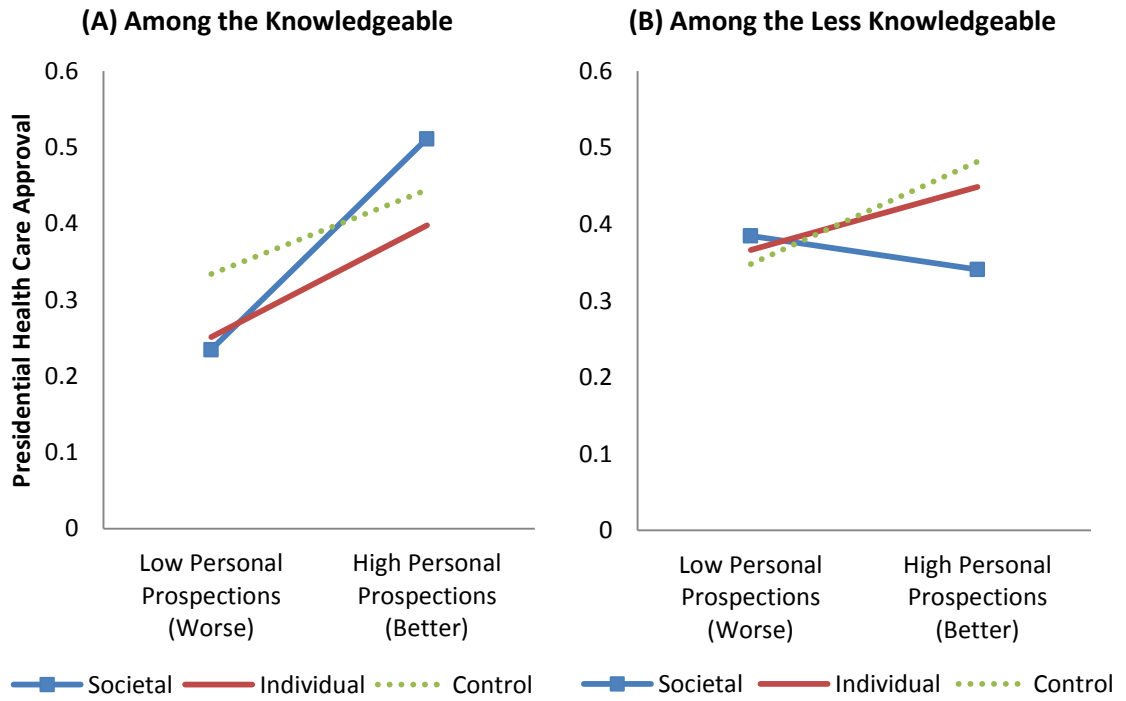
Notes: a. Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. b. Entries are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses. All variables are coded 0 to 1. Control variables included in the analyses are age, gender (female), party identification, education, race (non-white), and income; continuous variables are mean-centered. #*p*<.10; \**p*<0.05; \*\**p*<0.01; \*\*\**p*<0.001.

Figure 4.5 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Political Knowledge and Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential health care approval. Low national prospctions are one standard deviation below the mean and high national prospctions are one standard deviation above the mean for national prospctions. Knowledgeable and less knowledgeable are at one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Control variables are centered at the mean.

Figure 4.6 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Health Care Approval, by Political Knowledge and Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential health care approval. Low national prospctions are one standard deviation below the mean and high national prospctions are one standard deviation above the mean for national prospctions. Knowledgeable and less knowledgeable are at one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively. Control variables are centered at the mean.



Table 4.4 Predicting Presidential and Policy Approval Variables with National and Personal Prospections, by Condition and Party Identification.

	Presidential Approval <sup>a</sup>		Presidential Health Care Approval <sup>a</sup>		Health Care Law Approval <sup>b</sup>	
	Pers	Nat'l	Pers	Nat'l	Pers	Nat'l
Individual Group	.028 (.076)	.040 (.080)	.055 (.075)	.057 (.080)	.942 (.826)	.934 (.870)
Control Group	.253** (.076)	.264** (.081)	.201** (.075)	.198* (.081)	1.550# (.927)	1.613# (.847)
National Prospections (Centered)	.290** (.099)	.114 (.301)	.368*** (.097)	.267 (.298)	5.696** (1.320)	6.598 (5.920)
Personal Prospections (Centered)	.106 (.287)	.312** (.107)	.031 (.283)	.259* (.106)	1.370 (4.922)	1.846 (1.434)
Democrats	.233*** (.066)	.239** (.071)	.234*** (.065)	.229** (.070)	1.352# (.697)	1.394* (.693)
Republicans	-.174* (.076)	-.166* (.081)	-.194* (.074)	-.196* (.080)	-1.099 (.900)	-1.145 (.954)
Prospections x Democrats	.274 (.303)	.215 (.303)	.310 (.298)	.140 (.300)	.678 (5.208)	-2.038 (5.973)
Prospections x Republicans	-.120 (.366)	-.046 (.346)	-.212 (.361)	-.204 (.343)	-2.219 (6.334)	-1.225 (6.670)
Prospections x Individual	.917* (.382)	.576 (.366)	1.055** (.376)	.621# (.362)	5.371 (6.439)	7.437 (8.439)
Prospections x Control	.499 (.362)	.442 (.355)	.446 (.357)	.289 (.352)	1.109 (6.109)	.712 (6.812)
Individual x Democrats	-.030 (.088)	-.043 (.093)	-.057 (.087)	-.060 (.092)	-.688 (.969)	-.724 (1.007)
Individual x Republicans	-.024 (.097)	-.049 (.101)	.013 (.096)	-.002 (.100)	-.333 (1.144)	-.218 (1.210)
Control x Democrats	-.200* (.086)	-.221* (.092)	-.212* (.085)	-.216* (.091)	-1.314 (.940)	-1.398 (.954)
Control x Republicans	-.181# (.098)	-.175 (.106)	-.145 (.097)	-.138 (.105)	-.818 (1.179)	-.807 (1.252)
Prospections x Individual x Democrats	-1.106* (.429)	-.711# (.406)	-1.259** (.423)	-.766# (.402)	-5.543 (7.121)	-6.138 (8.895)

Prospections x Control x Democrats	-.367 (.408)	-.271 (.391)	-.445 (.402)	-.222 (.387)	-2.354 (6.653)	-.607 (7.157)
Prospections x Control x Republicans	-.259 (.468)	-.271 (.391)	-.156 (.461)	-.048 (.436)	2.474 (8.091)	2.405 (8.296)
Prospections x Individual x Republicans	-.796 (.485)	-.663 (.451)	-.619 (.478)	-.401 (.446)	-5.681 (7.957)	-10.676 (9.359)
<i>N</i>	426	426	426	426	424	423
$R^2$ / Nagelkerke $R^2$	.613	.610	.603	.596	.629	.634
Log Likelihood					316.414	313.378

Notes: a. Entries are ordinary least squares coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses.

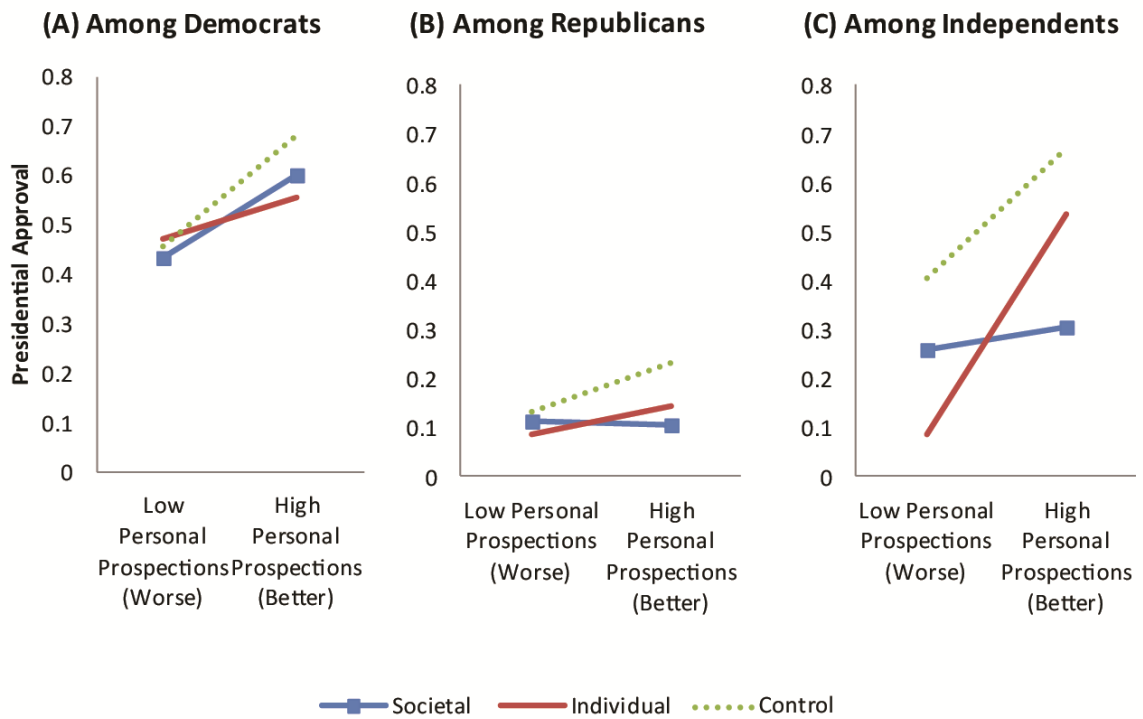
b. Entries are logistic regression coefficients, standard errors are in parentheses.

All variables are coded 0 to 1, personal prospections, national prospections, and political knowledge are mean-centered. Control variables included in the analyses are age, gender (female), party identification, education, race (non-white), and income; continuous variables are mean-centered. # $p < .10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Finally, H4 predicted that the priming relationship would be strongest among the independents compared to the partisans. Table 4.4 and Figures 4.7 and 4.8 show that this was indeed the case. For presidential approval, there were no priming relationships present for Republicans or Democrats (although the individual condition appeared to have a slight dampening effect relative to the control group), but one was evident for independents, as depicted in Figure 4.7. Likewise, there is no priming present among Democrats in Figure 4.8 related to the president's approval on health care. This is not surprising, since Democrats likely already felt that health care would get better for them personally which they linked with the president's policy. The downward sloping line in Figure 4.8 Panel B, seems to show that Republicans in the societal condition felt that the better things would get for them, the less they approved of the president. This may be explained by counterarguing or because of the discussion of costs of the law in the societal group made them upset at the president at the same time that they thought things

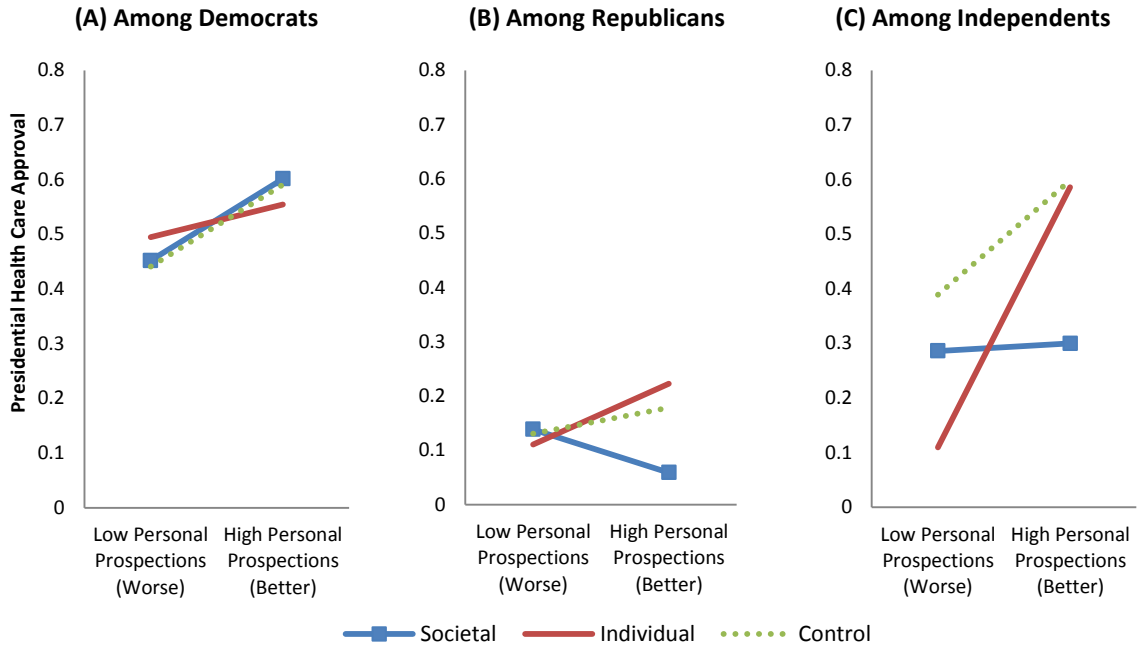
would get better for their own health care. On the other hand, the largest priming effects were among the independents, where being in the individual condition allowed them to link their personal concerns about health care to the president. The reasoning behind this was that independents would not be able to rely on typical partisan positions in their evaluations and would therefore find particular messages more persuasive. Although this did not happen for them with the societal group increasing national prospections in evaluations of the president, it could be that they were already used to a message framed at the societal level on health care, and so the effect appeared for the individual frame and personal prospections.

Figure 4.7 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Approval, by Political Interest and Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential approval. Low personal prospections are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospections are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospections. Control variables are centered at the mean.

Figure 4.8 The Relationship between Personal Prospections and Presidential Health Care Approval, by Political Interest and Condition.



Note. Values on the Y-axis represent predicted presidential approval. Low personal prospctions are one standard deviation below the mean and high personal prospctions are one standard deviation above the mean for personal prospctions. Control variables are centered at the mean.

### Conclusion

The individual frame appears to have increased personal prospctions relative to the societal frame among the less interested, the less knowledgeable, and among the independents (and Republicans to some extent). Because most of the significant findings among these groups dealt with increasing the strength of personal prospctions on presidential approval, it appeared that the hypotheses were generally supported. However, the pattern of findings show that another explanation is warranted, especially when considering that most of the time among the more knowledgeable, the more

interested, and the Democrats, the societal frame led personal prospections to factor more strongly into presidential evaluations than the individual frame did, as one might expect. It could be that because the health care debate was so prominent in the news, individuals were not able to differentiate between personal and national prospections and that the conditions that resonated with previous interpretations primed those interpretations rather than priming the self or others as would be expected.

It should also be noted that the findings for this chapter were the reverse of the findings for the previous chapter. Explanations for why this might be the case will be discussed in the conclusion chapter, although it seems that differences between how novel or longstanding each issue was is the most likely explanation. The next chapter will also discuss the nature of the meaning of the mixed findings overall and what it means for the theory more generally.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

This dissertation shows that proximal and distal news content can prime personal and national perceptions. It also shows that the phenomenon of political priming is highly conditional. Different priming dynamics were evident among different kinds of citizens. Specifically, priming differences emerged among the knowledgeable, interested, partisan, and for those with real-world experience. Moreover, the media environment is important to priming effects; specifically, findings suggest that novel versus longstanding issues may contribute to this dynamic. Priming changes the criteria citizens use in political evaluations, yet it does so in different ways depending on both the type of issue and individual characteristics. Results of this dissertation underscore the importance of considering how different factors might interact to affect the priming relationship.

For the social distance dimension in the experiment from Chapter 3 (inflation), both knowledge and income moderated the priming effect. Among those with higher income and higher knowledge, the individual condition was associated with stronger relationships between personal perceptions and several of the presidential approval variables. Notably, national projections were not primed in any of these moderating relationships. The temporal distance dimensions, however, produced fewer priming effects. Grocery shopping was a moderator of the priming effect, and in one instance interest was as well. Among the shoppers, the near future condition was associated with a stronger relationship between personal perceptions and Federal Reserve trust, while the

distant future condition was linked to a stronger relationship between national perceptions and Federal Reserve trust. In Chapter 3, I suggested that fewer priming results were probably related to the way in which the stimulus for temporal distance differentiated between time frames. Interestingly, party identification did not have a moderating effect across either type of distance dimension even though it seemed that Republicans might have been more receptive to the content.

Chapter 4, which looked at health care and relied on framing different dimensions of social distance in the stimulus, found more moderating effects than the previous chapter. In particular, interest, knowledge, and partisanship all moderated, though having real-world problems with health care did not. The individual frame was linked to stronger associations between personal perceptions and the presidential approval variables among the less knowledgeable, the less interested, and the independents. However, national perceptions were also primed where interest moderated; among the interested, there were stronger relationships between national perceptions and the presidential approval variables for the societal condition (compared to the individual condition). Among the disinterested in the individual condition the relationship between national perceptions and the presidential approval variables were stronger than among the disinterested in the societal condition.

In terms of knowledge, the opposing findings across the two chapters were consistent with the literature on priming novel issues (Druckman & Holmes, 2004; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McGraw & Ling, 2003; Togeby, 2007). When the issue was novel or at least not as prominent on the media agenda, as in the case of inflation, the most knowledgeable respondents elicited the hypothesized priming effect, whereas when



the issue was highly visible and subject to protracted debate, as in the case of health care, the predicted priming effects were evident among the less knowledgeable.

To investigate the relative novelty of the two issues, I examined the frequency that each appeared on the nightly network news programs on CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN, and Fox.<sup>36</sup> Using the Vanderbilt Television News Archives, I searched between January 1, 2010 and September 15, 2011 for stories on health care and inflation. A total of 7 stories included the term “inflation” in either the title or story abstract, while 414 stories included the term “health care.”<sup>37</sup> This shows that inflation was not very high on the agenda in the almost two years leading up to the study, while health care was quite high on the agenda, providing support for the notion that inflation was a novel issue for participants.

McGraw and Ling (2003) suggested that the reason the effect of knowledge differs depending on the novelty of the issue is because of how knowledgeable individuals process information. On longstanding issues, highly knowledgeable individuals should resist priming because they should have more stable opinions and should already have encountered and incorporated their impressions of a leader (and presumably an issue) into their overall evaluations. On newer issues, more knowledgeable individuals should be easier to prime because they can more easily incorporate new information. However, their account is somewhat different than others because it relies on the idea that those who are knowledgeable incorporate new

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<sup>36</sup> CNN and Fox News stories are based on stories appearing during one hour per day of coverage.

<sup>37</sup> When I used the term “healthcare” only 19 stories were returned. Although these might have been redundant with the search “health care” they appeared to be additional stories. This was based on a quick examination of a small handful of stories where I looked at both the title and abstract of the “healthcare” stories for the additional term “health care.” Additionally, when I narrowed the time frame from January 1, 2011 to September 15, 2011, there were still 99 stories that included health care.

information through on-line processing, updating old impressions when they encounter new information.

Most arguments for how priming work are based on the activation of prior knowledge (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Klinger, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007), although there are debates about the precise mechanism involved (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). When individuals encounter a prime, prior knowledge or considerations should be activated and used in subsequent judgments. As some have noted, if the framing of a prime matches pre-existing considerations or schema, an effect should be stronger than if it is inconsistent (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Hwang, Gotlieb, Nah, & McLeod, 2006). However, in the absence of pre-existing considerations, priming effects are likely to be small or non-existent. As a result, the least knowledgeable should be less likely to manifest priming effects with a new issue because they lack pre-existing considerations. Those most likely to have pre-existing considerations are individuals who are knowledgeable generally or those who already sensitized to the issue—and having real-world experience (and related knowledge) with an issue can sensitize people to an issue. This likely explains the findings in the inflation chapter where the issue was novel.

It is not just knowledge or real-world cues that should have differential effects depending on the novelty of the issue. The role of partisanship can also be understood in terms of novelty. On issues that have been on the agenda longer, people may be more likely to know where the parties stand on issues and have a partisan schema for the issue that will be more accessible. Although it appeared that inflation might be more resonant for Republicans, there were no partisan interactions. On the other hand, partisanship was clearly an issue for health care. Partisan attitudes are more accessible to strong and

unconflicted partisans (Bassili, 1995). As a result their partisan attitudes may be more easily primed when messages are about partisan issues or the messages have partisan content. In this case people likely had partisan considerations in line with how they would expect the issue to affect them personally and how it would affect others.

The effect of level of political interest might also be consistent with this interpretation. In the inflation study, interest did not moderate (except in one instance), which appeared surprising because knowledge was a moderator. On the other hand, interest moderated in the health care study, acting similarly to knowledge where personal perceptions were primed. For the novel issue, interest did not matter much, while for the longstanding issue, interest made a difference. Research indicates that the motivation provided by interest could help individuals overcome SES based gaps in knowledge (Kwak, 1999). This suggests that interest is appropriately conceived of as a motivational variable that can help people acquire and integrate information. Those who are interested may not have the same ability or pre-existing knowledge or considerations that can be activated when an issue is new. However, the motivational aspect of interest could allow the interested to catch up to the knowledgeable over time. Thus, as an issue is on the agenda for longer the interested may come to look like the knowledgeable, and the less interested and more interested would then diverge in their ability to be primed (or in the manner in which they are affected by priming).

Therefore, the influence of knowledge, partisanship, interest, and real-world cues are likely to be dependent on the extent to which individuals' have accessible considerations for a message. For novel issues or frames, individuals are less likely to have either existing or accessible considerations, and thus should be less likely to

experience priming. On the other hand, where individuals have accessible considerations, the message should resonate with those considerations and be activated in subsequent judgments.

The interaction of issue novelty with individuals' processing capacities has important implications in light of more natural settings. Researchers have pointed out that for messages to be persuasive, individuals have to receive and accept messages (Iyengar & Kinder, 1997, p. 61; Zaller, 1992). Zaller argued that the most knowledgeable are likely to be the most resistant to messages; however, they are also the most likely to receive them. That there were stronger priming effects among the low knowledge individuals in the health care study, which was a high exposure debate, suggests that messages about health care were likely to have had priming effects outside of the experimental setting. Likewise, the inflation study has implications beyond the experimental conditions as well. Knowledgeable individuals would be more likely to receive a novel message, such as the inflation messages. However, in the inflation study, they were also more likely to be primed. This suggests that there should be differences among who can be primed between longstanding messages and novel ones in more natural settings as well.

Despite results that appear consistent with the way in which novel or longstanding issues should work, the difference between the two experiments was not limited to novelty. Inflation may be a more abstract and complicated issue. Pilot results showed that the mean ratings for the complexity of the different versions of the inflation story were similar to the mean ratings for the two versions of the health care stories, although the

inflation means were slightly higher.<sup>38</sup> Complexity is likely related to novelty because issues that have been heavily discussed are likely to seem easier and appear less complicated; nevertheless, it is difficult to separate novelty from complexity in this case. Even if novelty and complexity do produce the same results, as some studies suggest (Kelleher & Wolak, 2006), it is possible that they work by different mechanisms. For example, Lenz (2009) suggests that easy issues such as the economy and race may be more likely to be primed than hard issues. Also, issue complexity and issue novelty might have different long-term effects even if they produce similar experimental results. For example, the degree to which elites can frame complex issues is probably limited by their complexity. On the other hand, over time and sustained attention, the novelty of an issue wears off and would not be limited in the same way as complex issues.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Mean ratings for the complexity of the health care study ranged between 4.38 and 4.55, while the means for complexity of the inflation study ranged between 4.51 and 4.98, both on the same scale. However, it should be pointed out that the pilots were conducted among Amazon Mechanical Turk respondents who tend to be slightly more educated than the general public. Among inflation pilot respondents, 16.8% of respondents reported having a post-graduate degree, 29.1% reported having a four-year degree, 7% reported having a 2-year degree, 33.2% reported having some college, and 13.6% of the sample had less than a college degree.

<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the two issues were also different in the degree to which they were viewed as partisan. Not all issues receive the same level of partisan differentiation as the health care issue did. However, this is likely related to both issues of novelty and complexity as I have described above.

Another difference is the valence of the stories. The inflation story was negatively valenced in that it suggested prices were rising, although the story itself had an ambiguous conclusion. The health care story, on the other hand, framed the health care law as a mostly positive change. Sheaffer (2007) argues that some communication effects, such as agenda-setting should matter less for positive news because people tend to pay more attention to negative information. Research indicates that people give more weight to negative information (Fiske, 1980). Priming studies, as an extension of agenda-setting have usually implicitly tested negative information or the negativity has been an important part of their argument (e.g., Heatherington, 1996; Mutz, 1998). To the extent that negative information is more likely to be involved in priming, then we should have expected to see more successful priming in the inflation experiments than the health care experiment, which was not the case. However, tests comparing the priming of negative information to positive information show that positive coverage primed positive evaluations while negative coverage primed negative evaluations (Sheaffer, 2007). It seems unlikely that the difference in valence had much to do with differences between priming effects across the chapters, so it still seems that novelty is the most likely explanation.

Not only should the effects of novelty and complexity be disentangled, but testing the mechanism behind how familiar versus novel information might work in priming is also important. Further research can be done to support whether studies, including this one, arguing that issue novelty is a core component in differentiating priming among individuals are actually seeing the effects of novelty or something else. To better determine whether an issue is novel or not, individuals' subjective familiarity with an issue could be assessed. Likewise, researchers could examine issue specific knowledge to gauge how novel an issue is for respondents. It would also be worthwhile to test how accessible issue-specific knowledge and attitudes are for both newer and longstanding issues.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, because these studies were experimental, the results should be subject to cautious interpretation when considering how these effects might generalize to other conditions.

Political priming is important to public opinion because it is relevant to both short term and long term political attitudes (Althaus & Kim, 2006; Claibourn, 2008). Roskos-Ewoldsen, Klinger, and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) point out that priming is usually thought of as only short-term and is defined this way by cognitive psychologists. Cognitive psychologists see priming as an increase in the accessibility of a concept in the

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<sup>40</sup> The two experimental studies also differed on the degree to which the differences across conditions were emphasized. The inflation conditions relied on differences between subtle cues while the health care conditions relied on larger differences between frames. This could be an alternate explanation for why fewer priming effects were found in the inflation experiment (extending to both time frame and social distance). However, this difference across the studies may be less important than differences related to novelty. This is because the existing literature suggests priming works in the same way whether the prime is an entire issue, a frame, or a cue—most studies suggest priming works by increasing accessibility. If priming relies on prior knowledge or attitudes which are made accessible by content, the subtlety of the content should be less important than the amount of prior knowledge individuals have as well as how accessible that knowledge is that is being activated. However, it is possible that the more subtle a cue, the more chronically rather than temporarily accessible prior knowledge needs to be, which could mean that priming with subtle content is more difficult than priming with larger differences. Although it is likely that the subtlety did not make a difference, it cannot be ruled out.

mind which is temporary. Media researchers argue that media priming works through accessibility, but news priming, at least from survey studies, is probably too distantly removed from the point of exposure to work in this manner. News priming, unlike more psychologically-oriented theories about priming, also does not focus on a single occurrence of a prime. Roskos-Ewoldson and colleagues suggest that repetition likely makes a concept chronically accessible. However, they point out that research has found that chronically accessible concepts can be made more accessible through priming in the short-term or repetition over the longer term, and can also become less accessible without reinforcement. Althaus and Kim (2006) go further, explaining that if people are repeatedly subject to primes, the stored knowledge that was initially activated or made accessible would be seen as more applicable to judgment tasks, would be more chronically accessible, and would be used in judgments even if the primes were not recent. Althaus and Kim found that news priming effects can be both short and long term phenomenon, and depend on both the recency and frequency with which a prime occurs. These explanations provide a basis for explaining how short-term effects, such as what researchers see in the lab, may develop into longer term effects, such as what are seen in survey studies of priming, and may also be more consequential for political behavior in the world outside the lab.

Another notable finding across the two experiments was that personal perceptions tended to be primed more often than national perceptions. This may have occurred because national perceptions were already chronically accessible and the stimulus material affected national perceptions the same way across all of the conditions. National perceptions are probably chronically accessible because of the way in which the news

frames issues. In the content analysis, I found that economic news tended to be covered much more frequently in terms of distal frames and cues than proximal ones. This was true for the social distance variables, which also served as primes in the experiments. Because the news does not cover issues using proximal content very often, people are not likely to be primed this way very often. The content used in the stimulus material was designed to look like op-ed articles or sidebars. Although people may not see this type of proximal content in the national news very often, there may be some issues where this type of framing is more common. Nevertheless, to the extent that this type of content is present, these studies suggest that the degree to which personal and national perceptions matter in national evaluations also appears to be context dependent. Mutz (1994) found that personal and national perceptions could both be primed when news coverage on unemployment was heavy. Additionally, the degree to which self-interest matters, and likewise, the degree to which symbolic beliefs matters varied from election year to election year for both guaranteed income and government health insurance (Lau & Heldman, 2009). These results are not surprising given that news coverage varies both in the frequency with which issues are covered and also how they are framed.

There are likely areas outside of the national news where the differences between social and temporal dimensions occur more often and are more likely to prime political evaluations. Candidate speeches have the ability to prime (Druckman & Holmes, 2004) and candidates may make personal appeals, especially where personal interests and collective interests do not align. Likewise, political advertisements can prime as well (Claibourn, 2008; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Political ads may make the same kinds of personal appeals in order to increase support. Political ads may also



attempt to make personal and national threats, for example to increase anxiety, which may shape public opinion (e.g., Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, & Provost, 2002). If political ads repeatedly primed messages appealing to self or collective interests or personal and national threats, political ads could have the effect of priming personal and national perceptions in candidate or even issue evaluations.

Likewise, local news and business news are other potentially important contexts for personal and national perception priming to occur. Davidson (2007) argued that finance news has become more personal, and he suggested that personal frames compared to non-personal ones should increase the relevance of both personal and national financial perceptions in evaluations of governments' economic policies. Local news also tends to try to foster a sense of local identity and cover issues that are local and matter to the community (Kaniss, 1991). As a result, this type of coverage may appear more physically proximal to a local sample than national news and may play a strong role in priming personal perceptions of both local and national issues.

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

In sum, this dissertation showed that personal and national perceptions could be primed in presidential and government evaluations using frames and other cues in news stories. It also demonstrated that this priming was conditional on knowledge, interest, partisanship, and real-world experience. However, it raised interesting questions about the nature of the priming effect for novel versus longstanding issues, issue complexity, and long versus short term effects. A next step worth investigating would be the

mechanism behind how familiar versus novel information might work in priming. Likewise, the mechanism for going from temporary to chronically accessible (or applicable) considerations could be explored further. Research suggests that the number of stories is not directly related to the weight that an issue carries in subsequent presidential evaluations (Malhotra & Krosnick, 2007) but that the recency and frequency of priming may be related to the accessibility and applicability of the priming effect. A lab study could shed light on the way in which recency, frequency, and novelty matter over time.

Additionally, the different proximal and distal dimensions I investigated may be more likely to be primed in survey studies where there is more natural variation between the distances at which an issue might be portrayed. Political advertisements, candidate speeches, and local news, might all have differences among the degree to which content is personal or collective, local or national, or emphasizes near or distant time frames. Additionally, because newsmagazines often provide more contextualizing analyses (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992) and blog reading also might, it is possible that these dimensions might be primed among readers of more complex information. Looking at these different types of media might shed more light on when people use personal or national perceptions to make political evaluations, especially where content is designed to make personal appeals. While this research showed that personal and national perceptions could be primed in political evaluations, and underscored the importance of examining individual differences, it also raises interesting and important questions that can be evaluated through future research.

## Appendices

### Appendix A Stimulus Material for the Inflation Experiment in Chapter 3

# Inflation Could Eventually Hit You in the Pocketbook

By Jill Kassel

Published: September 27, 2011

The cost of living will skyrocket next year thanks to rising food and clothing costs.

According to the World Bank, wheat prices will double over the next year. Corn and sugar are both up 73 percent, so your frosty glass of Coca-Cola might eventually be liquid gold.

If that's not enough for you, here's more: Cotton prices will soon be at their highest in a decade. The result? Many companies, such as J.C. Penney, Nike, and Anne Klein, plan to raise prices down the road on the clothing you buy. Next year, you'll also see higher prices at the grocery store on pork, beef, poultry, pasta, milk, vegetable oil, and eggs.

Federal Reserve committee members expressed concerns about sharp future increases in inflation last month and again this month, despite recent decreases. They argue that inflation of food and other goods combined with new measures to stimulate the economy could, in time, spur further inflation and hurt consumer spending.

By law, the Federal Reserve is responsible for price stability—which is a low, steady rate of inflation. So, by ignoring inflation is the Fed brushing off future problems?

The answer is maybe. The Federal Reserve may not be able to influence inflation in the coming months, but it does influence inflation a year or two down the road.

Although some economists argue that a bit of inflation is helpful, with larger amounts of inflation you could expect to see the costs of all types of goods and services increase. Your personal savings might eventually feel like they're shrinking if inflation is high.

During the debilitating inflation of the 1970s, the markets had no confidence in the Fed, and the Fed may not have acted quickly enough. Price increases in some areas led to expectations that inflation would rise, which gave rise to actual price increases in other areas.

Can the Fed act when the time comes and save you from paying higher prices or seeing your savings dwindle? Maybe. Even if inflation expectations get out of line, the Fed is likely to act aggressively enough to restore price stability and maintain its credibility on inflation. Let's hope inflation concerns are overblown. Otherwise, you could eventually experience higher prices.

# Inflation Could Soon Hit You in the Pocketbook

By Jill Kassel

Published: September 27, 2011

The cost of living will skyrocket in the next couple of months thanks to rising food and clothing costs.

According to the World Bank, wheat prices will double in the next three months. Corn and sugar are both up 73 percent, so your frosty glass of Coca-Cola might soon be liquid gold.

If that's not enough for you, here's more: Cotton prices will soon be at their highest in a decade. The result? Many companies, such as J.C. Penney, Nike, and Anne Klein, plan to raise prices in the next couple of months on the clothing you buy. In the coming months, you'll also see higher prices at the grocery store on pork, beef, poultry, pasta, milk, vegetable oil, and eggs.

Federal Reserve committee members expressed concerns about sharp future increases in inflation last month and again this month, despite recent decreases. They argue that inflation of food and other goods combined with new measures to stimulate the economy could, soon enough, spur further inflation and hurt consumer spending.

By law, the Federal Reserve is responsible for price stability—which is a low, steady rate of inflation. So, by ignoring inflation is the

Fed brushing off problems?

The answer is maybe. The Federal Reserve may not be able to influence inflation immediately, but it does influence inflation less than a year down the road.

Although some economists argue that a bit of inflation is helpful, with larger amounts of inflation you could expect to see the costs of all types of goods and services increase. Your personal savings might feel like they're shrinking if inflation is higher.

During the debilitating inflation of the 1970s, the markets had no confidence in the Fed, and the Fed may not have acted quickly enough. Price increases in some areas led to expectations that inflation would rise, which gave rise to actual price increases in other areas.

Can the Fed act in time and save you from paying higher prices or seeing your savings dwindle? Maybe. Even if inflation expectations get out of line, the Fed is likely to act quickly and aggressively enough to restore price stability and maintain its credibility on inflation. Let's hope inflation concerns are overblown. Otherwise you could soon experience higher prices.

# Inflation Could Eventually Affect the Nation

By Jill Kassel

Published: September 27, 2011

The cost of living will skyrocket next year thanks to rising commodity prices.

According to the World Bank, wheat prices will double next year. Corn and sugar are both up 73 percent, so that frosty glass of Coca-Cola might eventually be liquid gold.

If that's not enough, here's more: Cotton prices will soon be at their highest in a decade. The result? Many companies, such as J.C. Penney, Nike, and Anne Klein, plan to raise prices down the road on clothing. Prices on pork, beef, poultry, pasta, milk, vegetable oil, and eggs will also cost Americans more next year.

Federal Reserve committee members expressed concerns about sharp future increases in inflation last month and again this month, despite recent decreases. They argue that inflation of food and other goods combined with new measures to stimulate the economy could spur further inflation and hurt consumer spending.

By law, the Federal Reserve is responsible for price stability—which is a low, steady rate of inflation. So, by ignoring inflation is the Fed brushing off future problems? The answer

is maybe. The Federal Reserve may not be able to influence inflation immediately, but it does influence inflation a year or two down the road.

Although some economists argue that a bit of inflation is helpful, with larger amounts of inflation the costs of all types of goods and services could be expected to increase. The overall savings in the U.S. might shrink if inflation is high.

During the debilitating inflation of the 1970s, the markets had no confidence in the Fed, and the Fed may not have acted quickly enough. Price increases in some areas led to expectations that inflation would rise, which gave rise to actual price increases in other areas.

Can the Fed act when the time comes and save the country from paying higher prices or seeing savings dwindle? Maybe. Even if inflation expectations get out of line, the Fed is likely to act aggressively enough to restore price stability and maintain its credibility on inflation. Let's hope inflation concerns are overblown. Otherwise, the nation could eventually experience higher prices.

# Inflation Could Soon Affect the Nation

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Can the Fed act in time and save the country from paying higher prices or seeing savings dwindle? Maybe. Even if inflation expectations get out of line, the Fed is likely to act quickly and aggressively enough to restore price stability and maintain its credibility on inflation. Let's hope inflation concerns are overblown. Otherwise, the nation could soon experience higher prices.

**Appendix B**  
**Stimulus Material for the Health Care Study in Chapter 4**

## How will the health care bill affect you?

By Jill Kassel

Published: August 11, 2011

The health care overhaul enacted last year is already starting to change the way millions of Americans get health insurance. Despite the passage of the bill, there is still some confusion about what it entails.

If you like your current insurance, you will be able to keep your current insurance.

You will have more security when it comes to health care because insurance companies will not be able to base premiums on pre-existing conditions or any future health conditions you might have.

You will have more access to prevention. You and your doctor will be able to work together on the decisions that are best for your preventative care to help prevent larger health problems down the road. Your doctor and health care professional will be rewarded for giving you the most effective and efficient care.

Individual health insurance is not easy to get right now. The health care law will make it much easier to get insurance. You will be able

to find the best plan to meet your needs which will be done through the marketplace – the “insurance exchange” – that will allow you to compare and purchase certified health plans. This could end up providing you with better coverage or lower costs than you would otherwise be able to find.

The bill will prevent you from being forced into bankruptcy in the case of a catastrophic health event. Insurance companies will not be able to revoke your coverage once you get sick by claiming to have discovered flaws in your initial application—so called “rescissions.”

Unless your family's insurance plan is worth more than \$27,500 or you earn more than \$250,000, you will not be paying any new taxes. If your income is low, you can even receive a tax credit. In the exchange, you'll be able to compare insurance policies to know what you are buying. If you cannot afford to buy insurance even with the subsidies, you won't be required to—you will be granted a hardship exemption.

# How will the health care bill affect the country?

By Jill Kassel

Published: August 11, 2011

The health care overhaul enacted last year is already starting to change the way millions of Americans get health insurance. Despite the passage of the bill, there is still some confusion about what it entails.

Most people will notice little change because people will be able to keep their current insurance.

Everybody will have more secure insurance coverage when it comes to their health care because insurance companies will not be able to base premiums on pre-existing conditions or future health conditions.

Funds for prevention will expand. It will promote access to primary and preventive care for many, reducing the amount paid for more serious consequences down the road. It will also strengthen the health care infrastructure by rewarding care coordination, innovation, and efficiency within the delivery system.

The health care law will make it easier to get

individual health insurance than it is right now. An “insurance exchange” will be set up, which is a marketplace of comparable certified health plans that individuals can purchase. This could provide the public with better options for coverage or costs than would otherwise be possible.

The bill will prevent health care related bankruptcy filings by individuals which will help the overall economy. It will help reduce large scale consumer bankruptcy, which could become worse in an economic downturn and have ripple effects on consumer spending and unemployment.

It is estimated that the whole package will cost \$938 billion over 10 years to expand insurance, which will reduce the number of uninsured by 32 million. But overall, the plan is projected to reduce the deficit by \$143 billion over the first decade based on savings from other health care programs like Medicare.



## **Appendix C**

### **Manipulation Check Question**

The pilot studies introduced a thought listing procedure to gauge how much respondents thought about themselves or about the country. Respondents were asked: “Please list the thoughts that occurred to you when you were reading this article. Please write your thoughts below so that each separate thought is on a different line in the list. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation, or complete sentences. Only fill as many of the boxes as you think is necessary to explain your thoughts.” They were given seven boxes in which they could list their thoughts. A later question then piped what respondents had written in each box back to them so they could evaluate it themselves. For each thought, respondents were asked: “Next, we would like you to evaluate what you wrote in the earlier question where you were asked to list your thoughts. Here is what you wrote for the first thought you had. Please rate it using one of the following options: *More about you as an individual, More about the country, This thought was not relevant to the article or issue.*” This procedure generated three separate variables: *number of individual thoughts, number of societal thoughts,* and the *total number of relevant thoughts.* These variables were based on a count of each type of thought based on the answers respondents selected themselves when they were asked to rate their thoughts. This procedure is based on a similar thought listing and coding technique used by Haddock and Zanna (1997; 1998).

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