

# APPENDIX

## Reality Bites: The Limits of Framing Effects for Salient and Contested Policy Issues

Michael M. Bechtel – University of St.Gallen  
Jens Hainmueller – Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Dominik Hangartner – London School of Economics & University of Zurich  
Marc Helbling – WZB Berlin Social Research Center

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### ABSTRACT

A large literature argues that public opinion is vulnerable to various types of framing and cue effects. However, we lack evidence on whether existing findings, which are typically based on lab experiments involving low salience issues, travel to salient and contentious political issues in real-world voting situations. We examine the relative importance of issue frames, partisan cues, and their interaction for opinion formation using a survey experiment conducted around a highly politicized referendum on immigration policy in Switzerland. We find that voters responded to frames and cues, regardless of their direction, by increasing support for the position that is in line with their pre-existing partisan attachment. This reinforcement effect was most visible among low knowledge voters that identified with the party that owned the issue. These results support some of the previous findings in the political communication literature, but at the same time also point toward possible limits to framing effects in the context of salient and contested policy issues.

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Michael M. Bechtel, University of St.Gallen, Department of Political Science, Rosenbergstr. 51, CH-9000 St.Gallen, Switzerland, [mbechtel.mail@gmail.com](mailto:mbechtel.mail@gmail.com).

Jens Hainmueller, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Political Science, 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139, [jhainm@mit.edu](mailto:jhainm@mit.edu).

Dominik Hangartner, LSE, Department of Methodology, London WC2A 2AE, UK, and University of Zurich, Department of Political Science, Affolternstr. 56, CH-8050 Zurich, Switzerland, [d.hangartner@lse.ac.uk](mailto:d.hangartner@lse.ac.uk).

Marc Helbling, WZB Berlin Social Research Center, Reichpietschufer 50, D-10785 Berlin, Germany, [helbling@wzb.eu](mailto:helbling@wzb.eu).

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## APPENDIX A: MEASUREMENT AND EXPERIMENTAL ITEMS

### *Outcome Variables*

Our outcome variables are the degree of support for the deportation initiative and respondents' vote intentions in the upcoming referendums. We measured support for the deportation initiative on a 0 (strongly disapprove) to 10 (strongly approve) scale: "How strongly do you approve or disapprove the deportation initiative? Please tell me this on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly disapprove and 10 means you strongly approve the initiative." We rescaled this measure to 0-1 and call the resulting variable *support*.

We then asked whether respondents intended to vote in the upcoming referendums on the deportation initiative. Those who intended to vote were asked: "Will you vote for or against the deportation initiative?" Those who stated to have already voted by mail were asked: "Did you vote for or against the deportation initiative?" We call this measure *pro vote*.

### *Measuring Political Knowledge*

We measured political knowledge using two quiz items. The first quiz was: "Do you happen to know or have a guess who currently is the Swiss president?" We offered respondents three possible answers (their order was randomized): Doris Leuthardt, Micheline Calmy-Rey, Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf. Respondents were coded as 1 if they gave the correct answer and 0 otherwise. The correct answer was Micheline Calmy-Rey.

The second quiz item was: "Do you happen to know or have a guess how many signatures are needed for a federal initiative?" We offered respondents three possible answers (their order was randomized): 50,000; 100,000; 200,000. Respondents were coded as 1 if they gave the correct answer and 0 otherwise. The correct answer was 100,000.

The variable *knowledgeable* equals one if a respondent gave the correct answers to both questions and is zero otherwise.

### *Party Identification*

We measure an individual's long-term partisan attachment using the following item: "Many people lean toward a certain party over a longer period of time, even though they sometimes

also vote for another party. Generally speaking, how strongly do you lean towards the SP on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (very strongly)”. We repeated the same question for the SVP. Respondents are coded as SVP or SP identifiers if they score 5 or more on the 10 point scale respectively.

### *Experimental Items*

Before exposing respondents’ to one of these statements (or no statement for those who were in the control group), we provided the following brief introduction to all respondents: “Now I would like to talk to you about the deportation initiative which will be voted over on 28th November.”

The experimental component followed this introduction and consisted of a 3 by 2 design. We included one set of pro treatments and one set of contra treatments. Each set contained an issue frame, a party cue, and a combination of both. These issue frames were crossed with a pro and contra direction. Individuals were randomly assigned to one of these six treatments groups or a control group. The control group received no frame or cue. The treatments looked as follows:

#### 1. Pro treatments

- *Pro issue frame*: “As you might know, some say that the deportation initiative will reduce crime rates and thereby add to public safety for Swiss people. For some severe criminal acts, the majority of convicts are immigrants.”
- *Pro party cue*: “As you might know, the SVP is in favor of the deportation initiative.”
- *Pro issue frame and party cue*: “As you might know, some say that the deportation initiative will reduce crime rates and thereby add to public safety for Swiss people. For some severe criminal acts, the majority of convicts are immigrants. Therefore, the SVP is in favor of the deportation initiative.”

#### 2. Contra treatments

- *Contra issue frame* “As you might know, some say that the deportation initiative discriminates against immigrants, because it implies different penalties for the same criminal act. This violates the Swiss federal constitution.”
- *Contra party cue*: “As you might know, the SP is against the deportation initiative.”
- *Contra issue frame and party cue*; “As you might know, some say that the deportation initiative discriminates against immigrants, because it implies different penalties for the same criminal act. This violates the Swiss federal constitution. Therefore, the SP is against the deportation initiative.”

## APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table B.1: Descriptive Statistics

| Variable               | N   | Mean | SD   | Min | Max |
|------------------------|-----|------|------|-----|-----|
| Support for Initiative | 850 | 0.48 | 0.36 | 0   | 1   |
| Pro-Vote               | 669 | 0.43 | 0.49 | 0   | 1   |
| Pro Issue Frame        | 914 | 0.14 | 0.34 | 0   | 1   |
| Pro Party Cue          | 914 | 0.13 | 0.34 | 0   | 1   |
| Pro Frame + Cue        | 914 | 0.14 | 0.35 | 0   | 1   |
| Contra Frame + Cue     | 914 | 0.13 | 0.34 | 0   | 1   |
| Contra Issue Frame     | 914 | 0.14 | 0.35 | 0   | 1   |
| Contra Party Cue       | 914 | 0.14 | 0.35 | 0   | 1   |
| SVP Identifier         | 874 | 0.38 | 0.48 | 0   | 1   |
| SP Identifier          | 853 | 0.45 | 0.49 | 0   | 1   |
| Knowledgeable          | 914 | 0.53 | 0.49 | 0   | 1   |

*Note:* Covariates party identification and knowledgeable are measured *prior* to the treatment assignment.

Table B.2: Effects of Frames and Cues on Support for Deportation Initiative: Individuals that Already Voted and Have Not Yet Voted

| Model No             | (1)               | (2)               | (3)               | (4)               |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Party Identification | Not Yet Voted     |                   | Already Voted     |                   |
| Outcome              | Support           | Pro Vote          | Support           | Pro Vote          |
| Pro Issue Frame      | 0.03<br>(0.06)    | 0.02<br>(0.09)    | 0.02<br>(0.08)    | 0.03<br>(0.11)    |
| Pro Party Cue        | 0.04<br>(0.06)    | 0.05<br>(0.10)    | -0.03<br>(0.09)   | 0.03<br>(0.10)    |
| Pro Frame + Cue      | 0.05<br>(0.06)    | 0.04<br>(0.10)    | 0.00<br>(0.09)    | 0.09<br>(0.11)    |
| Contra Issue Frame   | -0.01<br>(0.05)   | -0.02<br>(0.09)   | -0.04<br>(0.08)   | 0.03<br>(0.10)    |
| Contra Party Cue     | -0.02<br>(0.05)   | -0.02<br>(0.09)   | 0.05<br>(0.09)    | 0.10<br>(0.11)    |
| Contra Frame + Cue   | 0.00<br>(0.05)    | -0.02<br>(0.09)   | -0.06<br>(0.09)   | 0.12<br>(0.13)    |
| Constant             | 0.49***<br>(0.04) | 0.44***<br>(0.07) | 0.47***<br>(0.06) | 0.36***<br>(0.07) |
| Observations         | 550               | 392               | 300               | 277               |

*Note:* Regression coefficients shown with robust standard errors in parentheses (\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ ). Support: Support for deportation initiative (0/1). Pro-Vote: 1 if will vote or voted for deportation initiative, 0 if will vote or voted against. The independent variables include one dummy variable for each treatment group (frame, cue, or both for pro and contra direction respectively). The reference category are respondents assigned to the control group with no frame or cue. Models 1 and 2 refer to the subsample of respondents that have not voted yet. Models 3 and 4 refer to the subsample of respondents that already voted.

Table B.3: Effects of Frames and Cues on Support for Deportation Initiative by Party Identification and Vote Status

| Model No              | (1)               | (2)               | (3)               | (4)               | (5)               | (6)               | (7)               | (8)              |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Party Identification  | SVP               |                   |                   |                   | SP                |                   |                   |                  |
| Outcome               | Support           |                   | Pro Vote          |                   | Support           |                   | Pro Vote          |                  |
| Already Voted?        | No                | Yes               | No                | Yes               | No                | Yes               | No                | Yes              |
| Pro Frames (combined) | -0.03<br>(0.06)   | 0.02<br>(0.07)    | -0.04<br>(0.10)   | 0.15<br>(0.12)    | -0.15**<br>(0.07) | -0.03<br>(0.11)   | -0.22**<br>(0.11) | -0.05<br>(0.14)  |
| Pro Frames (combined) | 0.07<br>(0.06)    | 0.02<br>(0.07)    | 0.04<br>(0.09)    | 0.11<br>(0.12)    | -0.11<br>(0.07)   | -0.04<br>(0.11)   | -0.14<br>(0.11)   | -0.03<br>(0.14)  |
| Constant              | 0.72***<br>(0.05) | 0.77***<br>(0.06) | 0.83***<br>(0.08) | 0.68***<br>(0.11) | 0.52***<br>(0.06) | 0.36***<br>(0.10) | 0.46***<br>(0.10) | 0.29**<br>(0.12) |
| Observations          | 210               | 112               | 152               | 104               | 242               | 127               | 188               | 119              |

*Note:* Regression coefficients shown with robust standard errors in parentheses (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ ). Support: Support for deportation initiative (0/1). Pro-Vote: 1 if will vote or voted for deportation initiative, 0 if will vote or voted against. The independent variables include one dummy variable for each of the combined treatment groups (either frame, cue, or both for pro and contra direction respectively). The reference category are respondents assigned to the control group with no frame or cue. Models 1-4 refer to the subsample of respondents that identify with the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Models 5-8 refer to the subsample of respondents that identify with the Social Democratic Party (SP). Models 1, 3, 5, and 7 refer to subsamples that have not yet voted and Models 2, 4, 6, and 8 refer to the subsample of respondents that already voted.

Table B.4: Effects of Frames and Cues on Support for Deportation Initiative by Level of Knowledge

| Model No                           | (1)               | (2)                | (3)               | (4)               | (5)               | (6)               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Party Identification               | All Respondents   |                    | SVP               |                   | SP                |                   |
| Outcome                            | Support           | Pro Vote           | Support           | Pro Vote          | Support           | Pro Vote          |
| Pro Issue Frame                    | 0.05<br>(0.06)    | 0.16<br>(0.11)     | 0.09<br>(0.08)    | 0.06<br>(0.15)    | -0.08<br>(0.10)   | -0.07<br>(0.16)   |
| Pro Issue Frame * Knowledgeable    | -0.05<br>(0.09)   | -0.21<br>(0.14)    | -0.17<br>(0.11)   | -0.16<br>(0.21)   | -0.03<br>(0.14)   | -0.07<br>(0.21)   |
| Pro Party Cue                      | 0.04<br>(0.07)    | 0.15<br>(0.11)     | 0.06<br>(0.08)    | 0.05<br>(0.15)    | -0.11<br>(0.11)   | -0.08<br>(0.17)   |
| Pro Party Cue * Knowledgeable      | -0.06<br>(0.10)   | -0.18<br>(0.14)    | 0.04<br>(0.10)    | 0.09<br>(0.19)    | 0.01<br>(0.15)    | -0.05<br>(0.21)   |
| Pro Frame + Cue                    | 0.12<br>(0.07)    | 0.28**<br>(0.12)   | 0.16**<br>(0.07)  | 0.23*<br>(0.12)   | 0.04<br>(0.11)    | 0.07<br>(0.17)    |
| Pro Frame + Cue * Knowledgeable    | -0.14<br>(0.10)   | -0.34**<br>(0.15)  | -0.16*<br>(0.10)  | -0.21<br>(0.17)   | -0.23<br>(0.14)   | -0.35*<br>(0.21)  |
| Contra Issue Frame                 | -0.01<br>(0.07)   | 0.10<br>(0.11)     | 0.01<br>(0.09)    | -0.00<br>(0.16)   | -0.06<br>(0.10)   | -0.10<br>(0.17)   |
| Contra Issue Frame * Knowledgeable | -0.01<br>(0.09)   | -0.15<br>(0.14)    | -0.00<br>(0.12)   | 0.01<br>(0.20)    | -0.12<br>(0.14)   | -0.15<br>(0.20)   |
| Contra Party Cue                   | 0.06<br>(0.06)    | 0.27**<br>(0.12)   | -0.03<br>(0.10)   | 0.12<br>(0.16)    | -0.03<br>(0.10)   | -0.00<br>(0.18)   |
| Contra Party Cue * Knowledgeable   | -0.11<br>(0.09)   | -0.38***<br>(0.16) | 0.04<br>(0.12)    | -0.04<br>(0.25)   | -0.13<br>(0.14)   | -0.21<br>(0.22)   |
| Contra Frame + Cue                 | 0.03<br>(0.06)    | 0.22**<br>(0.11)   | -0.05<br>(0.08)   | 0.06<br>(0.15)    | -0.11<br>(0.10)   | -0.13<br>(0.17)   |
| Contra Frame + Cue * Knowledgeable | -0.09<br>(0.09)   | -0.33**<br>(0.15)  | 0.02<br>(0.11)    | -0.06<br>(0.20)   | 0.02<br>(0.14)    | -0.03<br>(0.22)   |
| Knowledgeable                      | 0.01<br>(0.07)    | 0.14<br>(0.10)     | 0.03<br>(0.08)    | -0.01<br>(0.15)   | -0.04<br>(0.10)   | 0.01<br>(0.16)    |
| Constant                           | 0.48***<br>(0.05) | 0.31***<br>(0.08)  | 0.72***<br>(0.06) | 0.77***<br>(0.12) | 0.50***<br>(0.07) | 0.40***<br>(0.13) |
| Observations                       | 850               | 669                | 322               | 256               | 369               | 307               |

*Note:* Regression coefficients shown with robust standard errors in parentheses (\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ ). Support: Support for deportation initiative (0/1). Pro-Vote: 1 if will vote or voted for deportation initiative, 0 if will vote or voted against. The independent variables include one dummy variable for each treatment group (frame, cue, or both for pro and contra direction respectively). The reference category are respondents assigned to the control group with no frame or cue. The models also include a full set of interaction terms with the respondent's level of political knowledge (0/1). Models 1 and 2 refer to all respondents. Models 3 and 4 refer to the subsample of respondents that identify with the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Models 5 and 6 refer to the subsample of respondents that identify with the Social Democratic Party (SP).



Table B.5: Effects of Frames and Cues on Support for Deportation Initiative by Level of Knowledge, 3-Point Scale

| Model No                                 | (1)               | (2)               | (3)               | (4)               | (5)               | (6)               |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Party Identification                     | All Respondents   |                   | SVP               |                   | SP                |                   |
| Outcome                                  | Support           | Pro Vote          | Support           | Pro Vote          | Support           | Pro Vote          |
| Pro Issue Frame                          | 0.08<br>(0.10)    | 0.29<br>(0.19)    | 0.15<br>(0.11)    | 0.03<br>(0.22)    | 0.04<br>(0.15)    | 0.13<br>(0.25)    |
| Pro Issue Frame * Knowledgeable (0-2)    | -0.04<br>(0.06)   | -0.17<br>(0.12)   | -0.10<br>(0.08)   | -0.04<br>(0.15)   | -0.09<br>(0.10)   | -0.16<br>(0.16)   |
| Pro Party Cue                            | 0.05<br>(0.11)    | 0.20<br>(0.19)    | 0.04<br>(0.12)    | -0.14<br>(0.24)   | -0.12<br>(0.16)   | -0.07<br>(0.23)   |
| Pro Party Cue * Knowledgeable (0-2)      | -0.03<br>(0.07)   | -0.10<br>(0.12)   | 0.03<br>(0.07)    | 0.16<br>(0.14)    | 0.01<br>(0.10)    | -0.03<br>(0.14)   |
| Pro Frame + Cue                          | 0.19<br>(0.12)    | 0.46**<br>(0.21)  | 0.26***<br>(0.10) | 0.28*<br>(0.16)   | 0.23<br>(0.17)    | 0.38<br>(0.26)    |
| Pro Frame + Cue * Knowledgeable (0-2)    | -0.10<br>(0.07)   | -0.25**<br>(0.12) | -0.13**<br>(0.06) | -0.12<br>(0.11)   | -0.21**<br>(0.10) | -0.34**<br>(0.15) |
| Contra Issue Frame                       | 0.01<br>(0.10)    | 0.20<br>(0.19)    | 0.04<br>(0.12)    | -0.07<br>(0.21)   | 0.06<br>(0.14)    | 0.07<br>(0.24)    |
| Contra Issue Frame * Knowledgeable (0-2) | -0.02<br>(0.06)   | -0.13<br>(0.11)   | -0.03<br>(0.07)   | 0.04<br>(0.13)    | -0.13<br>(0.09)   | -0.17<br>(0.14)   |
| Contra Party Cue                         | 0.12<br>(0.10)    | 0.49**<br>(0.20)  | -0.07<br>(0.15)   | 0.09<br>(0.27)    | 0.06<br>(0.15)    | 0.31<br>(0.28)    |
| Contra Party Cue * Knowledgeable (0-2)   | -0.08<br>(0.06)   | -0.29**<br>(0.12) | 0.04<br>(0.09)    | 0.00<br>(0.16)    | -0.11<br>(0.10)   | -0.28*<br>(0.17)  |
| Contra Frame + Cue                       | 0.06<br>(0.10)    | 0.34*<br>(0.20)   | -0.06<br>(0.12)   | -0.02<br>(0.23)   | -0.05<br>(0.15)   | -0.02<br>(0.26)   |
| Contra Frame + Cue * Knowledgeable (0-2) | -0.05<br>(0.06)   | -0.20*<br>(0.12)  | 0.01<br>(0.07)    | 0.04<br>(0.15)    | -0.04<br>(0.10)   | -0.08<br>(0.15)   |
| Knowledgeable (0-2)                      | -0.01<br>(0.04)   | 0.08<br>(0.08)    | 0.03<br>(0.05)    | -0.05<br>(0.09)   | -0.02<br>(0.07)   | 0.05<br>(0.10)    |
| Constant                                 | 0.50***<br>(0.07) | 0.28**<br>(0.14)  | 0.70***<br>(0.08) | 0.84***<br>(0.15) | 0.51***<br>(0.10) | 0.32*<br>(0.17)   |
| Observations                             | 850               | 669               | 322               | 256               | 369               | 307               |

*Note:* Regression coefficients shown with robust standard errors in parentheses (\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$ ). Support: Support for deportation initiative (0/1). Pro-Vote: 1 if will vote or voted for deportation initiative, 0 if will vote or voted against. The independent variables include one dummy variable for each treatment group (frame, cue, or both for pro and contra direction respectively). The reference category are respondents assigned to the control group with no frame or cue. The models also include a full set of interaction terms with the respondent's level of political knowledge (0/1/2). Models 1-4 refer to the subsample of respondents that identify with the Swiss People's Party (SVP). Models 5-8 refer to the subsample of respondents that identify with the Social Democratic Party (SP).