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The Effect of Framing on Emotion and Policy Opinion:  
An Investigation of the Illegal Immigration Issue

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## Abstract

Politicians recognize the value of emotional appeals when attempting to influence opinion and garner public support. However, research concerning the impact of rhetorical framing on emotions often considers emotion to be an individual level-phenomenon. Using Intergroup Emotions Theory (IET), this study investigates the effect of framing upon emotional responses and political perspectives regarding the issue of illegal immigration. In an online survey, participants read a simulated excerpt from a presidential campaign speech that argued for an increase in border security to curb illegal immigration and its negative impact on Americans. The excerpt employed either a thematic frame, which focused on statistics related to immigration, or an episodic frame, which focused on the plight of an individual. Further, the ethnicity of a “victimized” group or person varied within the frame. Contrary to findings from prior framing studies, results of this study showed that episodic frames were not significantly more emotionally engaging than thematic frames. Also, both frames elicited similar levels of change in policy opinion, but in a direction opposite from that of the excerpt’s argument. As predicted from the racialized nature of illegal immigration, emotional reaction and policy opinion differed according to participant race and featured race. This study helps reveal the complexities of responses among different racial groups to immigration rhetoric. Results suggest that groups’ reactions to rhetorical strategies are particular to the policy issue at hand and that not all members of the electorate are interchangeable.

A sizeable body of research supports the notion that emotion often plays a central role in impacting individuals' political decision-making processes. It is not surprising, then, that attempts by news media, campaigns, and others seeking to influence opinion and garner public support have used emotional appeals to frame political issues (Gross, 2008). Although much of the framing research focuses on cognitive reactions (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Nelson & Kinder, 1996), the existing studies that examine emotional responses to framing provide insight for understanding the role of emotion in political communication. However, since emotion has traditionally been considered an individual level phenomenon (Smith, Seger & Mackie 2007), even these existing studies on emotional and framing provide little information about the possible effects of issue-framing on group-level emotions. This study extends Gross' (2008) work by examining whether or not the use of episodic and thematic framing in a persuasive message affects group-level emotional responses and policy opinions of voters. Intergroup Emotions Theory (IET) is used to assess how the priming of ethnic group identity within episodic and thematic frames impacts emotional reactions of voters.

### Framing Background

Throughout the framing literature, there exist varying definitions of "frames." Druckman (2001) categorizes these definitions into *frames in communication* and *frames in thought*. Frames in communication refer to a speaker's uses of words, images, phrases and presentation styles when communicating with another (Cappella & Jaimeson, 1997; Gitlin, 1980; Iyengar, 1991), whereas frames in thought refer to what an individual sees as relevant to understanding a situation (Goffman, 1974; Sweester & Fauconnier, 1996). Although frames are consistently recognized as existing in both public discourse and in the minds of individuals, (Brewer, 2001;

Druckman, 2001; Iyengar, 1991), authors generally agree that frames in communication play a vital role in influencing frames of thought. Therefore, it is apparent why those looking to understand the catalysts for people's political opinions and decisions would analyze frames of communication—the foundation of this “framing effect.”

For political elites, framing is a way of conveying complex social policy problems and telling audience members which aspects of those problems to focus their attention on. According to Gurevitch and Blumler (1990), frames target audience members directly through press conferences, debates, advertisements, and speeches. Speeches are considered a primary source of elite political thought (Gamson and Modigliani 1987), and speeches during political campaigns, when a candidate's success is highly contingent on swaying members of the electorate, utilize strategy targeted toward persuading audiences of a particular demographic (e.g. a political campaign speech at a conference for the Council of La Raza Unida, or a speech presented to the NAACP). This study will analyze issue-framing in campaign speeches since this has not been a central focus in the literature (rather, issue-framing in news media has been the focus).

An important assumption underlying the political communication framing literature is that people are sensitive to contextual cues when they express opinions or make decisions. How an issue or event is “framed,” by emphasizing certain aspects of that issue over others, is a contextual cue that could be used within political candidates' campaign speeches to influence audience members' judgments and decisions about that particular issue (Gross, 2008; Iyengar, 1991). The shaping of individuals' opinions on issue-related policies has been reflected by multiple studies that emphasize the significance of news media's imposition of frames on particular issues (e.g., Brewer, 2001; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Gross, 2008; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Jacoby,

2000; Ju, 2006; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Although political speeches have not been sufficiently investigated as a source of framing, the existing research on framing within news media provides relevant information applicable to understanding framing in various forms of political communication, including speech.

### Framing and Emotion

Some existing framing studies focus on frames specific to an issue or context, while others spotlight more general, rhetorical device-like frames, such as episodic and thematic framing. Kinder & Sanders (1990) assessed emotional responses to varying frames specifically related to affirmative action. Affirmative action framed as an unfair advantage proved to be associated more strongly with negative emotions than did affirmative action framed as reverse discrimination. Gross (2008) analyzed the effect of episodic and thematic framing on emotional response and policy opinion. Episodic framing of issues was more emotionally engaging, while thematic framing was more persuasive. Both studies, along with others (e.g., Brewer, 2001), suggest that framing operates through both affective and cognitive channels. Thus, emotional responses, not just cognitive ones, are shown to depend on how an issue is framed.

An important characteristic of the framing argument that can be taken from these studies on news media and applied to analyzing frames in other forms of communication is its derivation from Appraisal Theory (e.g., Gross, 2008; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004). Appraisal Theory, while there are multiple versions (e.g., Ellsworth, 1991; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman, 1991), suggests that events, by themselves, do not determine emotional responses, but rather it is the evaluations and interpretations of those events. This theory claims that cognitive comparison of an actual state to a desired or desirable state is an essential precursor of emotions. Therefore, if frames alter the

information and considerations audiences have available when interpreting events, it follows that emotional responses should differ depending on the frame used to present an issue.

Gross (2008) applies Appraisal Theory to understand emotional responses to episodic and thematic frames. While episodic frames offer a specific example or case study, thematic frames place issues into a broader context. Consistent with Appraisal Theory, the type and strength of emotions elicited depends on whether the message recipient interprets the situation as consistent or inconsistent with their expectations and desires. Because episodic frames manipulate the way audience members interpret events often by providing them with information regarding the plight of an individual, this “human interest” information they have available is expected to be emotionally engaging and increase sympathy for a featured subject. Therefore, the “human interest” aspect of an episodic frame is expected to be more emotionally engaging than are statistics and generalities of a thematic frame (Gross 2008). Iyengar (1991), however, argued that episodic frames might instead lead people to hold featured individuals responsible for their own dilemmas and divert attention from societal responsibility, consequently reducing support for programs designed to resolve social problems. Thus, there is strong evidence suggesting that episodic frames could actually be less persuasive in a context that might lead individuals to attribute responsibility for a problem to the featured individual.

While Gross’ study uses emotional appraisal to help explain the way frames affect emotion, a fundamental characteristic of Appraisal Theory missing from this research is the way individual and situational factors interact to generate different emotional responses. Roseman (1991) and Lazarus & Lazarus (1994) state that two individuals with different appraisals of the same event may react with different emotions. At the same time, two individuals with the same appraisals of different events should respond with the same emotion. This emotional

phenomenon reflects people's varied personal goals and beliefs, which then influence the personal meaning individuals create from similar circumstances (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). Such meaning exists innately in the "cognitive structures and commitments developed over a lifetime that determine the personal and hence emotional significance of any person-environment encounter" (Lazarus, 1984, p.). Thus, it is an individual's identity, reflecting these "cognitive structures and commitments developed over a lifetime," or an individual's "culture," so called by Lazarus & Lazarus (1994), that influences the goals and beliefs which cause relational meanings one constructs in appraising situations. These assertions involving the rudiments of Lazarus' appraisal theory engender implications for analysis of individuals' differing emotional responses, including that which has been presented in the framing literature. When making a framing effect argument, it seems important to investigate the audience members' identity and how it will condition the individual over time to be more or less impacted by particular frames. Identity or culture factors of Appraisal Theory are often missing from the framing literature when analyzing differing emotional responses among audience members.

Although a few existing framing experiments and studies address racial identity in some circumstances, such as how manipulating the racial identity of a featured individual influences people's responses (e.g., Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Gross, 2008; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), there is little focus on how the racial identity of participants might also affect their responses. For example, Gross (2008) was interested in whether the race of the individual portrayed in the episodic frame would alter the emotional impact of that frame on the subject. She included in her experiment a race manipulation to determine the level of sympathy and pity expressed by participants and to determine if the emotional effects of the episodic frame would differ when a news column featured a Black woman versus a White woman.

Gross found that empathy was not specific to the race of the individual portrayed. However, had the race of the subjects been taken into consideration, Gross may have discovered something further. For example, there could have been increased sympathy expressed by Black subjects when reading the news column about the Black woman, and more negative feelings expressed when reading the news column about the White woman. Such findings could be very advantageous for those trying to influence the opinion of a subset of the population, as often is the case when presidential candidates give campaign speeches. These framing speculations, derived in part from Lazarus' explanation of how identity and culture influence emotional appraisal patterns, necessitate further investigation of group-related identities, such as race, as a factor influencing emotional responses. Therefore, I now review the relationship between framing, social group identity, and emotion.

### Framing, Group Identity, and Emotion

Nelson and Kinder (1996) relate framing to group identity by arguing that the importance of group sentiment in public opinion depends on how issues are framed in elite rhetoric. They conducted four experiments that presented subjects with variously framed issues, such as government spending to assist the poor. Each policy issue lent itself to "group-centric thinking," which is characterized as leading "individuals to reach opinion by drawing on their thoughts and feelings toward the group in question" (Nelson & Kinder, 1996, p.) Their analysis suggested that power of group attitudes to influence opinion on social policy depends on how the policy is framed. They found that impact of group attitudes on policy opinion was significantly larger when the policy had been framed in a way that emphasized the social group at the center of the controversy. While their study provides insight to the relationship between group identities and

framing, it lacks an explanation of the role emotions play when these group-centric frames are employed.

Specifically, Intergroup Emotions Theory (IET) (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Smith & Mackie, 2006) speaks to the previously described assertion that identity is a crucial component of emotional appraisal theory. Intergroup emotions theory (IET) also follows from appraisal theory by using the conception of the self to connect events and goals seen as relevant to a group with emotions felt by an individual who identifies with the group (Ginger-Sorolla, Mackie, & Smith, 2007). In other words, when an individual identifies with a group, that in-group becomes part of the self, thus acquiring social and emotional significance (Smith, Seger, & Mackie, 2007; Tajfel, 1981). The IET literature suggests that group allegiances and loyalties are an important factor in conditioning political stimuli produced by campaigns.

Research by Hutchings et. al. (2006) revealed an understanding of identity-based emotions in response to threatening or reassuring political stimuli. Descriptions of George W. Bush and Al Gore, as either opposed to or supportive of black interests, elicited different emotions for black and white participants. Huddy & Mason (2008) use a similar theoretical approach, but highlight the importance of partisan allegiances, rather than ethnic allegiances, to eliciting emotions within a campaign.

The focus of IET on *who* is most likely to react with strong feelings to political stimuli, rather than only on *how* or *which* emotions are elicited by political stimuli, offers insight to the idea that groups respond differently to emotionally appealing stimuli. Current framing literature, which uses appraisal theory for theoretical foundation, can be expanded upon by incorporation of IET. The introduction of IET to current framing research will further explore the complexity of frames, which are not likely to arouse uniform positive or negative responses in all people

(Huddy & Mason, 2008). It is important to understand how their impact, like many political stimuli, depends on voter's identity-based allegiances and loyalties (Miller and Krosnick, 2004). Thus, this study examines if emotional responses and policy opinion differ in between episodic and thematic frames, and if priming of ethnic group identity within these frames impacts emotional reactions and policy opinions of voters.

#### Issue of Analysis: Illegal Immigration

The value of Latino support to presidential candidates and their parties was powerfully displayed in the 2008 election. Latino support for the Republican presidential candidate fell from 39% in 2004 to 31% in 2008. Election results and national surveys revealed that many Latinos were driven away from the GOP most specifically due to the harsh anti-immigrant tactics and rhetoric of conservative political elites (America's Voice, 2008). By 2005, most estimates of undocumented immigrants in the United States were cited as 11-12 million, but the overall range was from 8-20 million (Garcia & Sanchez, 2008). With illegal immigration now often ranked among the top five biggest problems facing the US according to national polls in 2008, it is no wonder that the issue has become a highly debated topic among politicians. According to America's Voice, a campaign to advance immigration reform, Republican opposition to immigration reform legislation and support of harsh, anti-immigrant policies has pushed Latinos further toward the Democratic party since 2004 (America's Voice, 2008).

The 2008 election was certainly not the first case of Latino mobilization as a response to conservative threats against illegal immigrants. For example, in 1994, California Governor Pete Wilson led a campaign for the state's Proposition 187, which was a severe measure designed to withhold not only health and social services from undocumented immigrants, but also withhold

educational services to the children of those immigrants. Harsh anti-immigrant ads played on the fears and xenophobia that some people hold and they seemed to be designed to scare voters into supporting the proposition (Garcia & Sanchez, 2008). Although the proposition did pass, this campaign led to a mobilization of Latino voters. The Republican advertising campaign, run at a time when the state was coming into majority-minority status, greatly hurt the position of the Republican Party in California among not only Latino voters, but unexpectedly among white voters (Garcia & Sanchez, 2008; Bowler, Nicholson, & Segura, 2006).

When considering why illegal immigration measures have historically incited mass response from not only illegal immigrants, but also Latino citizens, we begin to address the underpinnings of Intergroup Emotions Theory. Garcia and Sanchez (2008) claimed that Latinos throughout the nation, regardless of how they felt personally about immigration, were offended at Proposition 187 attacks because they were attacks on members of their own ethnic group. Even third- and fourth- generation Latinos had expressed sympathy for people from their ancestral homelands. Although this proposition, and other anti-immigrant measures, were not explicit attacks on Latinos, they were perceived to be “anti-Latino” and the Republican Party was subsequently perceived as anti-Hispanic (Garcia & Sanchez, 2008). There is much evidence suggesting that illegal immigration and its policies are strongly racialized as an inherently Latino-related issue (Chomsky, 2007; Beasley 2006; Barreto et. al., 2008; Brader & Valentino, 2007). For example, a study by Brader and Valentino (2007) found that people’s opinions on illegal immigration are strongly influenced by their level of prejudice toward Latinos.

When drawing from Intergroup Emotions Theory, it follows that if Latinos perceive illegal immigrants as part of their in-group, attacks on illegal immigrants will be taken as attacks against the entire ethnic group. While some authors attribute Latino participation and support for

a largely immigrant cause to group solidarity (Barreto et. al., 2008), Intergroup Emotions Theory goes even deeper to address the social-psychological underpinnings of that group solidarity.

The issue of illegal immigration is unique in that it provokes the perception of threat in different ways and by various groups. In addition to Latinos seeing anti-immigration rhetoric as a threat against the in-group, many non-Latinos see the actual flow of illegal immigration to the United States as a threat as well. Immigration is sometimes charged as a threat to American culture, but more often perceived as an economic threat (Beasley, 2006; Garcia & Sanchez, 2008; Rivera, 2008; Brader & Valentino, 2007). In fact, much of the anti-immigrant rhetoric that Latinos have reacted to, especially in the 2008 election, revolves around the accusation of illegal immigrants as a risk to the economic welfare of American citizens. Illegal immigrants are blamed for causing and exacerbating a wide variety of problems in the United States, especially unemployment and low wages (Chomsky, 2007). This “immigrants take American jobs” argument has been the most commonly used to justify the need for a restrictive immigration policy. The logic is that mass immigration inundates the job market with low-skilled workers, creating a loose labor market and resulting in lower earnings and less opportunity for advancement for low-skilled American citizens (Chomsky 2007; Rivera 2008; Krikorian 2008). Therefore, illegal immigrants are seen as a double threat considering their status as both non-majority (i.e. Latino) and non-American (i.e. “illegal”). The focus of this study on illegal immigration, which provides a rich context of ingroup-outgroup threat, will help us understand how certain frames might prime group identity, increase awareness of threat, and result in affective reactions and political opinions suggestive of subsequent political behavior.

Political elites, especially while running for office, have used various rhetorical techniques, including episodic and thematic framing, when debating, discussing, or giving

speeches on the issue of illegal immigration. Because much research supports the notion that emotions impact political decisions, these script techniques are often employed in hope that “an emotional nerve be touched” among targeted populations (Beasley 2006). As discussed earlier, Gross (2008) found that episodic frames elicited more sympathetic emotions than thematic frames, but thematic frames elicited stronger change in opinion toward the persuasive direction of the frame (i.e. favoring a reduction of mandatory minimum sentencing). In a 2008 Democratic Primary debate in California, candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton utilized episodic and thematic framing strategies when responding to a question regarding illegal immigration. An African American woman claimed that illegal immigrants were increasing unemployment in the African American community by taking jobs (again, here is that threat to the in-group), and wanted to know how the candidates would address that issue once in office. Hillary Clinton used an episodic frame stating:

“I believe that in many parts of our country, because of employers who exploit undocumented workers and drive down wages, there are job losses. And I think we should be honest about that. There are people who have been pushed out of jobs and factories and meat processing plants, and all kinds of settings. And I meet them. You know, I was in Atlanta last night, and an African-American man said to me, ‘I used to have a lot of construction jobs, and now it just seems like the only people who get them anymore are people who are here without documentation.’ So, I know that what we have to do is to bring our country together to have a comprehensive immigration reform solution” (*Transcript: Democrats debate in CA, 2008*).

Barack Obama took a different position claiming that illegal immigrants should not be used as a scapegoat for increasing unemployment and a failing economy. He used a thematic frame, identifying statistics that all ethnic groups were suffering from unemployment and it was not a result of illegal immigration (*Transcript: Democrats debate in CA, 2008*). Obama and Clinton possessed different positions on the issue and used different framing techniques to impact their audience.

While I am interested in affective responses to episodic and thematic framing, I am also interested in how priming of ethnic identity within these frames impacts intergroup emotions. For example, Hillary Clinton's response to the illegal immigration question indirectly perpetuated an in-group threat by telling the African American questioner that it was an "African American man" who was being displaced from the workforce as a result of illegal immigration. This study attempts to understand, using Intergroup Emotions Theory, how a message's rhetorical focus on victims of the same in-group identity elicit emotions, and if those emotions may be enhanced or reduced depending on an episodic or thematic frame.

Similarly, when Obama and McCain spoke to Latino audiences using episodic frames, they spoke about individuals with ethnically identifiable Latino names, such as "Felicitas," "Francisco," (*Campaign Speeches*, Obama to NALEO, 2008) or "Maria Hernandez-Gonzales" (*Campaign Speeches*, McCain to the National Council of La Raza, 2008). Intergroup emotions theory suggests that such a strategy produces identity salience, leading one to identify with the victim and feel emotions of sympathy and associated anger or fear toward the threatening out-group (Yzerbyt et al., 2003). Because emotions such as fear, anger, and sympathy, have been shown to affect political behavior in various ways (Brader & Valentino, 2007; Brader, 2005; Huddy, Feldman, & Cassese, 2007; Lupia & Menning, 2007), the ethnic priming of these emotions can be used to a politician's advantage. Based on intergroup emotions, I predict varying the featured ethnic identity within episodic and thematic frames will have an effect on ethnic groups' emotional responses and policy opinions when candidates express conservative rhetoric about illegal immigrants being an existential threat and America's need for heightened border security. This anti-immigration stance will allow for an in-depth analysis of intergroup emotions and framing since it is, as said above, laden with intergroup threat on multiple levels.

## Research Hypotheses

H1: Episodic framing of illegal immigration policy will elicit stronger emotions than thematic frames on the same topic

Drawing from Gross' (2008) research concerning episodic and thematic framing, I hypothesize that emotions will be stronger after exposure to an episodic frame regarding a "victim" of illegal immigration. Particularly, the "human interest" aspect of episodic frames will elicit more sympathy than thematic frames, as was the case in Gross' study.

H2: Thematic frames will be more persuasive than episodic frames.

When comparing pretest opinions on immigration to post-manipulation opinions on immigration, I predict both episodic and thematic frames to have a statistically significant effect on policy change in the direction of the argument (i.e. the argument will render participants less favorable toward immigration). However, based on research by Gross (2008) and Iyengar (1991), I expect the change in policy to be greater among those who receive a thematic frame.

H3: Race congruent frames, where the race of a featured victim is congruent with that of the message recipient, will elicit more sympathy than race incongruent frames, where the race of a featured victim does not match that of the message recipient.

Scherer (2001) suggested the appraisal theory foundation of intergroup emotions can be used to explain sympathetic emotions resulting from social identity primes. He claims that shared emotion between two individuals is based on our ability to infer the needs and goals of others and to share values and norms. Based on this framework, the likelihood of a sympathetic response to the plight of another person is greatly enhanced if that person belongs to the same social group. This is the case because sharing a greater amount of relevant appraisal criteria, as

well as the existence of a greater ability to infer the underlying appraisal processes of the other (Garcia-Preito & Sherer, 2006; Sherer, 2001; Yzerbyt, 2003) are what lead to the emotional convergence predicted by intergroup emotions theory.

H4: Responses may vary depending on the race of the featured victim and the race of the participant.

Based on the racialized nature of the illegal immigration issue, I expect racial identity to play a role in people's responses to a message on this topic. For example, when presented with an anti-immigration frame, I would expect Latinos to react somewhat differently from the general sample because of their distinctive and historical relationship with the issues of immigration and illegal immigration. I expect that Latinos will react in ways opposite to those predicted by the general hypotheses because they see the anti-immigrant message as a threat, leading them to buffer against that negative feeling by reacting with an even more positive stance on immigration. Other ethnic groups may respond differently depending on how they view illegal immigrants (e.g. double threat, a partial threat, or as entirely part of the in-group and not a threat at all).

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were recruited from the 2007 list of Los Angeles County registered voters, obtained from the Los Angeles County Registrar of voters. The subject pool consisted of voters with recorded email addresses. A random selection tool in SPSS was used to obtain a random sample of 100,000 people; they received an invitation to the study via email. Of these, 2,051 started the survey and 276 dropped out, resulting in a final  $N = 1,775$  (50% female; 50% male;

11.6% Asian, 11.7% Latino, 4.7% Black, 62.3% White). Among Latinos, 65% said they traced their ethnic heritage to Mexico. About 15% of the total sample were foreign born, the median age was 37 years old, Further, the political affiliation breakdown was 46% Democrat, 17% Republican, and 23% Independent.

The entire study was conducted online and responses were recorded online. Subjects had approximately three weeks from the end of March to mid-April, 2009, to respond to the recruitment email and participate in the study. The first 100 subjects who took the survey were compensated with a \$10 gift-card to their choice of three online stores. All other subjects who participated were entered into a drawing for a \$250 Visa gift card. Upon completion of the survey, participants were debriefed as to the actual goal of the study and thanked for their participation.

### *Design*

The experiment employed a 2 (frame: episodic, thematic) x 4 (target race: White, Black, Asian, Latino) factorial design and subjects were randomly assigned to read one of eight articles, four episodic and four thematic, in which the race featured in the article either matched or did not match that of the participant. The article was a simulated excerpt from a political campaign speech that argued for heightened border security to curb the flow of undocumented immigrants into the United States. This excerpt highlighted the threat of undocumented immigrants on American citizens with regard to labor competition and suppression of wages. It focused on the “victim,” who was negatively affected by increased illegal immigration (See Appendix A for sample articles). The immigration excerpt was created using information and quotations that appear in actual presidential campaign speeches when candidates speak on the issue of increased border security.

*Procedure*

The study was conducted using the website [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com). Data was collected over three weeks during the spring 2009 academic semester. Qualtrics was used for construction and implementation of the survey, as well as data collection.

Subjects were sent an email inviting them to participate in an online voter opinion survey that assessed their opinions regarding various political issues, a deception used to mask the actual purpose of the study. The email also informed potential participants of the study, explained that it was approved by the university's International Review Board (IRB), emphasized that all data was confidential, and that they could leave the study at any time. If participants clicked the survey link, they were directed to the survey.

Subjects were first prompted to include their email address if they wished to be eligible for compensation. They then completed a pretest questionnaire that gauged their opinion on 15 policy questions, 3 of which were related to illegal immigration and the rest served as distracter questions. Participants responded on a 5-point likert scale (where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=unsure/no opinion, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree), which asked them to indicate their level of agreement with subsequent policy statements. The three statements regarding illegal immigration were as follows: (1) The US government should spend more money on increasing border security. (2) Illegal immigrants are an overall gain to the US economy. (3) Illegal immigrants should not receive any of the rights or benefits that lawful permanent residents enjoy. Participants were then asked to use a feeling thermometer to rate their feelings toward various out-groups including illegal immigrants, Whites, Latinos, Asians, and Blacks. Veterans, homosexuals, and politicians were inserted as filler groups to distract from race. Participants were also presented with a 1 item racial tolerance scale, which asked them to identify their level

of agreement with the following statement: “Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Hispanics should do the same without any special favors.” Higher responses indicate greater tolerance and lower resentment.

Next, all participants were asked to read three different articles, one regarding welfare, one regarding the environment, and another regarding illegal immigration. The welfare and environment articles were distracters for this experiment so as to prevent from excessive attention being paid to the immigration article. The immigration article was presented as an excerpt from a past presidential campaign speech. Following each passage were questions relating to certain policies. For example, after reading the immigration article, participants were asked five emotion questions. Specifically they were asked if the presidential candidate giving the speech made them feel hopeful or made them feel angry. Also, they were asked how much sympathy they felt toward Americans losing their jobs, and how angry and fearful they felt toward illegal immigration. These last three emotions, which suggest empathy and aversion, were selected because it was anticipated that they were the emotions most likely to be evoked by the details of the excerpt. In past studies, these emotions were most commonly elicited when the victim was a member of the in-group (e.g. Brader & Valentino; Huddy & Mason 2008; Yzerbyt et. al. 2003). Participants were also asked three policy questions, the exact three that were in the pretest. Likert scales were used for both policy and emotion questions.

Using a randomization tool in Qualtrics, each participant was randomly assigned to read one of eight speech excerpts on illegal immigration. There were four episodic frames, which featured a male individual who had been fired from his low-skilled construction occupation as a result of his employer hiring illegal immigrants. All episodic frames were identical except for varying the race of this victimized individual. Racial identity in the episodic frames was varied

implicitly, via racial surname of the individual featured. For example, to prime ethnic identification for White subjects, there was a frame highlighting the displaced worker, “Daniel Roberts.” To prime ethnic identification for Latino subjects, there was a frame highlighting the displaced worker, “Daniel Gonzalez.” Also, there were four thematic frames, which did not highlight a specific individual or situation, but instead used generalities and statistics to identify a specific ethnic group that was suffering from unemployment and suppression of wages as a result of illegal immigration. The thematic frames referred explicitly to the ethnic groups, such as “White Americans” and “Hispanics” as being victims of the increased job competition and wage suppression caused by illegal immigration. All thematic frames were identical except for varying the race of this victimized ethnic group.

Following the experimental manipulation, participants were asked to answer questions about their racial in-group. They indicated their racial/ethnic background and answered a host of questions about how strongly they identified with their in-group. Participants were again asked to rate their feelings toward out-groups (the same set of out-groups in the pretest, just in a different order) and answer the racial tolerance question. Finally, participants answered a host of demographic variables to gauge for gender, education, generation, income, and party affiliation, strength of party identification, and vote history.

## Results

I found minimal support for the hypothesis that episodic framing alters emotional response relative to a thematic frame on the same topic (Appendix B). I ran a One-Way ANOVA to compare the effect of frame on emotional response. Table 1 presents the means of emotional reaction by frame condition, along with their respective F- and P-values. It is important to note

that higher numbers signal more “positive” feelings, so higher number for sympathy would indicate *more* sympathy, whereas higher numbers for fear and anger would actually indicate *less* fear and anger (to maintain consistency with higher numbers reflecting a more positive position toward illegal immigration). By default, lower numbers for fear and anger would indicate more “negative” responses toward illegal immigration, reflecting *more* fear and anger. Results show that, in general, episodic and thematic frames differed only in terms of fear toward illegal immigrants. Thematic frames elicited greater fear ( $M=4.08$ ) toward illegal immigrants than did episodic frames ( $M=4.20$ ),  $F(1,1752)=4.21, p<.05$ . There were no significant differences between the frames for the emotions of sympathy toward Americans losing their jobs or anger toward illegal immigration.

Further, I used a paired samples t-test to assess change in policy opinion from the policy questions in the pre-test to the policy questions immediately following the experimental treatment (Appendix C). Both thematic frames  $t(854)=-2.69, p=.007$  and episodic frames  $t(888)=-1.97, p=.05$  elicited change in policy opinion from the pre-test to the post-test for the statement, “The US government should increase funding for border security.” While both frames elicited change, a One-Way ANOVA revealed no significant difference between episodic and thematic frames in eliciting change. It is also important to note the direction of change in opinion that both frames elicited. Participants became *more* favorable toward immigration (i.e. less in favor of increasing funding for border security) after reading the anti-immigrant message. There was no significant change in opinion for the statements, “Illegal immigrants are an overall gain to the US economy” and “Illegal immigrants should not receive the same rights as citizens.”

A One-Way ANOVA compared the effect of race congruence on emotional response (Appendix B). Results in Table 2 show that, in general, those who received a race congruent

( $M=4.23$ ) frame expressed significantly more sympathy toward Americans losing their jobs than those who read a race-incongruent message ( $M=4.07$ )  $F(1, 1757)=6.38, p=.01$ . In other words, people were more likely to express sympathy for Americans losing their jobs when the victimized individual described as losing his job to illegal immigrants in the frame was of the same race as the participant. When examining the results by race of the subject, White participants expressed significantly more sympathy in the race congruent frame ( $M=4.26$ ) than they did in the race incongruent frame ( $M=4.08$ )  $F(1, 1091)=5.66, p<.05$ . So, when “Daniel Roberts” was described as losing his job to illegal immigrants, White subjects were significantly more likely to experience sympathy for Americans losing their jobs than if they read about “Daniel Gonzales,” “Daniel Chung,” or “Jermaine Williams.”

When disaggregating results by race of the participant and race of the featured individual, we see that emotional responses are specific to racial identity. For example, Latinos ( $M=4.46$ ) expressed significantly less fear toward illegal immigration than did all other racial/ethnic groups. Latinos ( $M=4.00$ ) also expressed significantly less anger toward illegal immigration than Blacks ( $M=3.21$ ) and Asians ( $3.67$ ),  $p<.05$ . Overall, participants expressed significantly more feelings of anger toward illegal immigration when reading about a Latino ( $M=3.45$ ) losing his job than a White person ( $M=3.72$ ) losing his job,  $p=.006$ . Further, when Whites read about Blacks ( $M=4.07$ ) or Latinos ( $4.06$ ), they reported significantly less sympathy than when they read about Whites ( $M=4.26$ ) or Asians ( $M=4.12$ ),  $p<.05$ . Latinos ( $M=4.00$ ) expressed significantly more anger when reading about a Black person ( $M=3.54$ ) than a White ( $M=4.35$ ) or Latino ( $M=4.04$ ) person losing their job,  $p<.05$ .

## Discussion

Contrary to my hypothesis based on Gross' (2008) study, I did not find strong evidence suggesting episodic frames were more emotionally engaging than thematic frames. In fact, when it came to fear, thematic frames actually elicited more fear than did episodic. One of the main differences between Gross' (2008) study and this one, which might help explain these findings, was that Gross did not include targets of the emotions. Whereas her emotion measures were more general, asking how the person felt in reaction to the article, mine were specific, asking how the person felt toward a specific target. The target for the fear measure was illegal immigration. This is important in understanding the relationship between the question and the passage. The episodic passage was identified as episodic because it focused on an individual who was put out of work due to illegal immigration. So perhaps people did feel fear in response to the episodic article, but it was more directly related to the episodic focus—job loss—and not necessarily illegal immigration.

Another difference between this study and Gross' study was that the political issues differed. Gross' treatment passage focused on reducing mandatory minimum sentencing, whereas my treatment passage related to illegal immigration and argued for an increase in border security. There is no doubt that the issue of mandatory minimum sentencing is less propagated in national media and less publicly debated than illegal immigration. Illegal immigration is often blamed for raising unemployment and suppressing wages for American citizens, and in general, is discussed as a matter affecting the nation as a whole. Therefore, the use of statistics and generalities in thematic frames to portray a negative impact on the nation, coincides with the way society typically understands and discusses the issue of illegal immigration and may be why a thematic frame elicited stronger emotions. Furthermore, it can be said that greater fear is unique

to illegal immigration, at least when comparing the issue with mandatory minimum sentencing. For example, the issue of illegal immigration, which is defined by an out-group (illegal immigrants) and an in-group (citizens), establishes intergroup threat, and consequently the potential for fear, more so than does mandatory minimum sentencing.

Another possible explanation for why the framing hypothesis was not supported is that the established framing effect (Gross, 2008) may be exclusive to articles and news media stories. As stated earlier, the framing of issues within speeches has not been studied to the same extent as framing within news articles. News articles have the ability to go into great depth on an issue (as in Gross' article on mandatory minimum sentencing), while discussion of an issue in campaign speeches, which often attempt to address a whole host of pressing issues, needs to be limited and concise. So it could be that episodic frames of news media articles are able to elicit more emotion than thematic frames because more time is spent talking about the individual and therefore enhancing the reader's ability to establish a greater connection between himself or herself and the featured individual. With that being said, our results have implications for effectiveness of framing in communication mediums where the amount of detail is limited, such as in speeches or debates where responses are timed. In these cases, thematic frames may be more powerful than episodic frames, at least for the elicitation of fear. The idea that framing within speeches may elicit emotions in a different manner than framing within news media calls for further examination in future research studies.

The hypothesis that a race congruent frame would result in greater levels of sympathy was supported by the results of this study. The fact that congruence between race of the featured individual losing his job and race of the participant led to greater sympathy helps support and can be explained by Intergroup Emotions Theory. It has been demonstrated that when a victim of a

harmful behavior is perceived to belong to the same group as the self, one is more likely to feel sympathetic emotions and the corresponding action tendencies on behalf of the victim even in situations that do not directly confront the self (Garcia-Prieto & Sherer, 2006; Yzerbyt, 2003). The results from this study have great implications for political candidates wishing to impact their audience using rhetorical strategy. Candidates are able to use race congruent frames when attempting to create sympathy, and since increased sympathy has been shown to be associated with greater susceptibility to persuasion (Gross 2008), using a race congruent frame might actually result in audiences agreeing more with the candidate's message.

A paired samples T-test revealed that both thematic and episodic frames elicited change in opinion with regard to whether the US government should increase spending on border security. This outcome seemed to only moderately support my hypothesis that thematic frames would be more persuasive since only one of the three policy questions elicited change in opinion. However, when taking a closer look at the manipulation, the passage was arguing only for increased border security to curb the flow of illegal immigrants. It did not argue for more or less immigrant rights or whether immigrants were a gain to the US. Therefore, it makes sense that if thematic frames are more persuasive, the effect would be on the policy that is argued in the persuasive message. Further, the fact that policy opinion changed in a direction opposite that of the excerpt's argument is of particular interest. Participants became more favorable toward immigration after reading an anti-immigrant message, independent of whether the message was framed thematically or episodically. Mendelberg (2001) provides one possible explanation for this outcome. He argues that most voters reject blatantly racial appeals because they violate deeply held egalitarian beliefs. Therefore, it is possible that the racialized nature of illegal immigration, coupled with the racial appeals in both frames, led participants to buffer themselves

against the message's attempt at persuasion. Another possibility is that participants simply recognized the excerpt as an experimental treatment and, in an effort to guard themselves from manipulation, expressed opinions that diverged from the excerpt's argument.

Moreover, the hypothesis that responses may vary depending on race was supported by the results of this study. The fact that Latinos expressed significantly less fear and anger toward illegal immigration than did all other racial/ethnic groups provides support for the idea that illegal immigration is a racialized issue and suggests that many Latinos consider illegal immigrants part of the in-group. Further, participants expressed significantly more feelings of anger toward illegal immigration when reading about a Latino ( $M=3.45$ ) losing his job than a White person ( $M=3.72$ ) losing his job,  $p=.006$ . This effect could be due to the fact that illegal immigration is not usually described as negatively affecting the Latino community. Rather, illegal immigrants are usually seen as part of the Latino community and, therefore, not a threat to Latinos. So perhaps this frame, in a sense, de-racializes the issue to an extent, allowing the victims to be Latino, and subsequently allowing Latinos and Asians (groups with the most positive feelings toward illegal immigrants) to express more anger toward the issue without appearing prejudice toward Latinos. The finding that Latinos expressed significantly more anger when reading about a Black person than a White or Latino person losing their job reflects a common reaction by the Latino community to the widespread scapegoating of illegal immigrants for African American unemployment. Although the target of Latinos' anger is not entirely clear, since anger toward "illegal immigration" could be referring to anger toward illegal immigrants or anger toward anti-immigrant rhetoric surrounding the issue, the racialized nature of the issue suggests in this case that anger is directed toward rhetoric. This deduction, if accurate, indicates

that it would not be in a political candidate's best interest to identify African Americans as victims of illegal immigration if attempting to conjure support from the Latino community.

### Conclusion

This study attempted to identify the effects of using episodic and thematic frames, as well as racial priming, in presidential campaign speeches. Results of the study help to identify the situations in which emotions of fear, anger, and sympathy, can be elicited among the audiences of speeches. While the results of many studies and experiments often generalize their findings to society as a whole, this study does not assume that all members of the electorate are interchangeable. Rather this research adds to the framing literature by looking at intergroup emotions theory and how ethnic identity priming within episodic and thematic frames affects people with various ethnic group identities. In regard to the issue of illegal immigration, I attempted to take into account the context that impacts emotional responses and affects susceptibility to persuasion. From my findings, I am able to conclude that framing effects need to be interpreted based on the issue at hand, the intensity of group salience to the particular issue, the strength and direction of intergroup threat, and the medium of communication (e.g. speeches, new articles, debates).

For those interested in understanding intergroup emotions and framing effects as they relate to the issue of immigration can take away from this study how various frames impact emotions of sympathy, anger, and fear. Much research has been done to show the behavioral consequences of these emotional responses. For example, it been shown that fear increases selective attention to threatening stimuli and produces negative interpretations of ambiguous information. Flexibility in cognitive processes is subsequently decreased for attributes associated

with the potential threat (Beck & Clark). Higher levels of intergroup fear and perceived threat therefore tend to strengthen original ingroup-outgroup boundaries (Wilder, 1993). Thus, when candidates, particularly Republicans, are discussing illegal immigration and attempt to elicit fear in their audiences toward illegal immigration in speeches, it may be to their advantage to use thematic framing as opposed to episodic framing.

Future studies that will contribute to this literature are those comparing different levels of ethnic identification among various groups and how strength of ethnic identification affects their emotions and policy change. Also, a regression analysis taking into account various demographic factors, such as gender, age, and political affiliation, will allow for more telling findings. To have a more significant impact among presidential campaigns, more exploration needs to be done on how distinct groups of the electorate may respond to similar emotional appeals in different ways (Leege & Wald, 2007; Schnur, 2007). Also, because many Republican strategists claim Republican candidates need to sway a significant portion of the Latino vote to be victorious in future presidential elections, further analysis on rhetorical implications for Latinos and immigration will be useful for campaign strategists.

## Appendix A

Example of Episodic Frame (Latino condition):

“[...] This election is about real problems facing Americans today. For example, unemployment is rising quickly, but yet hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants cross our borders each year only to take jobs away from hardworking Americans like **Daniel Gonzalez**. Daniel is a man from Los Angeles who was recently laid off from his construction job and later found out his employer had been hiring undocumented workers for lower wages. Daniel can't find a decent paying job and is now struggling to support his family.

From people like Daniel, we have seen that admitting large numbers of illegal immigrants reduces job prospects and depresses wages for American workers. He, like all Americans, should not have to watch our broken borders go unfixed, and our laws be disrespected. This issue is about sovereignty, security, and fairness.

As president, I will work to protect the border by strengthening its security. When we have achieved our border security goal, disheartening stories like that of Daniel Gonzalez will not be so prevalent. Ending illegal immigration won't be an easy task, but I have the will to bring order and fairness to a situation that is currently out of control.”

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Note: To vary the ethnic identity prime within the frame, the ethnically identifiable name of “Daniel Gonzalez” for the Latino condition was replaced with “Daniel Chung” for the Asian condition, “Daniel Roberts” for the White condition, and “Jermaine Williams” for the Black condition.

Example of Thematic Frame (Black condition):

“[...] This election is about real problems facing Americans today. For example, unemployment is rising quickly, but yet twelve million illegal immigrants are working and living in the US, while hundreds of thousands of people cross our borders illegally each year only to take more jobs away from hardworking Americans.

A shift of jobs from the legal workforce to illegal immigrants has contributed to a spike in unemployment, especially among **African American** citizens. When illegal immigration increased during the past year, the unemployment rate among African American citizens shot up to 8.4 percent, compared to 4.7 percent unemployment for non-African-American workers.

Data and basic economics indicate that an increasing number of illegal immigrants reduces job prospects and depresses wages for American citizens. To prevent certain populations from being disproportionately displaced due to illegal immigration, we should refuse to watch our broken borders go unfixed, and our laws be disrespected. This issue is about sovereignty, security, and fairness.

As president, I will work to protect the border by strengthening its security. When we have achieved our border security goal, discouraging unemployment statistics will not be so prevalent. Ending illegal immigration won't be an easy task, but I have the will to bring order and fairness to a situation that is currently out of control.”

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Note: To vary the ethnic identity prime, the explicit identification of “African-American” for the Black condition was replaced with “Asians Americans” for the Asian condition, “White Americans” for the White condition, and “Hispanics” for the Latino condition.

## Appendix B

**Table 1:** Emotional Response and Policy Opinion by Frame

Emotion	Episodic	Thematic	F-value	P-value
Sympathy	4.10	4.12	0.07	0.79
Fear	4.20	4.08	4.21	0.04**
Anger	3.63	3.54	1.59	0.21
Policy				
Border Security	2.77	2.73	0.29	0.59
Immigrant Rights	2.96	2.95	0.02	0.90
Immigrant gain	2.85	2.81	0.43	0.51

Note: Table entry is mean emotional response and mean policy opinion score by frame. In the survey, Fear, Anger, and Border Security were reverse coded so that higher numbers consistently mean more “positive” reactions to immigration. This means higher scores for aversion emotions and anti-immigrant policy should be inversely interpreted as less fear, less anger, and less strict immigration policy. Asterisks indicate that responses to episodic and thematic frames differed significantly (One-Way ANOVA on means): \*\*\* $p < .01$  \*\* $p < .05$  \* $p < .10$ .

**Table 2:** Emotional Response and Policy Opinion by Race Congruence/Incongruence

Emotion	Race Congruence	Race Incongruence	F-value	P-value
Sympathy	4.23	4.07	6.38	0.01***
Fear	4.13	4.14	0.07	0.80
Anger	3.70	3.55	3.46	0.06*

Note: Table entry is mean emotional response and mean policy opinion score by race congruency. In the survey, Fear, and Anger were reverse coded so that higher numbers consistently mean more “positive.” This means higher scores for aversion emotions should be inversely interpreted as less fear and less anger. Asterisks indicate that responses to episodic and thematic frames differed significantly (One-Way ANOVA on means): \*\*\* $p < .01$  \*\* $p < .05$  \* $p < .10$ .

**Appendix C**

**Table 1: Change in Policy Opinion for Episodic Frames**

Policy	Pre-test	Post-test	t-value	p-value
Border Security				
Immigrant Rights				
Immigrants as Gain				

Note: Table entry includes mean policy opinion score in the pre-test and post-test. In the survey, measures for increasing border security and whether illegal immigrants should receive the same rights as citizens were reverse coded so that higher numbers consistently mean more “positive.” This means higher scores for these “anti-immigrant” policies should be inversely interpreted as less strict immigration policy. Asterisks indicate that responses to episodic and thematic frames differs significantly (Paired Samples T-Test on means): \*\*\*p<.01 \*\*p<.05 \*p<.10.

**Table 2: Change in Policy Opinion for Thematic Frames**

Policy	Pre-test	Post-test	t-value	p-value
Border Security				
Immigrant Rights				
Immigrants as Gain				

Note: Table entry includes mean policy opinion score in the pre-test and post-test. In the survey, measures for increasing border security and whether illegal immigrants should receive the same rights as citizens were reverse coded so that higher numbers consistently mean more “positive.” This means higher scores for these “anti-immigrant” policies should be inversely interpreted as less strict immigration policy. Asterisks indicate that responses to episodic and thematic frames differs significantly (Paired Samples T-Test on means): \*\*\*p<.01 \*\*p<.05 \*p<.10.

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