Stereotypes and Stories: The Effect of Storytelling in the Political Arena

By

Myra Brielle Harbin

Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in

Political Science
August 2016
Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:
Larry Bartels, Ph.D.
Marc Hetherington, Ph.D.
John Geer, Ph.D.
Monique Lyle, Ph.D.
Wendy Schiller, Ph.D.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Alan Zuckerman. Alan led the first seminar I took in graduate school at Brown: research design. Over the course of the semester, he challenged my thinking and gave me tools to think rigorously about concept formation, research design and how to move beyond methodological dogmatism. Alan was also a great source of support in my earliest days of graduate school. He encouraged me to draw on my experiences working in Washington and living abroad when forming research questions. I still remember going to his office one afternoon and nervously telling him that I wanted to forgo the typical path of Americanists in the department and study American and Comparative Politics. As I finished explaining why studying comparative politics was so important to me, I looked up at Alan who was smiling at me from across his desk. He told me that he was certain I had important things to say in both fields. He also told me he would do whatever he could to help me. Anyone who knew Alan likely understands why his words left such an impression on me. He was never one to mince words. In fact, I sometimes chuckle at memories of him telling someone he disagreed with "you're wrong." Alan passed away from pancreatic cancer a year after our conversation. While I remain deeply saddened by his death, I feel lucky to have known him. During some of the most difficult periods in my graduate school career, I wondered what advice Alan would have to offer in the situation. I wish he were here to see that I did what I said I wanted to do that afternoon. I hope you are resting in peace, Alan. Thank you for everything.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the most important lessons I learned in graduate school is the importance of asking for help. There are so many people, too many to name, who generously offered their time, sense of humor, expertise, words of wisdom or sympathetic ear when I needed it. Each of you made this possible.

I would first like to thank my mother, Teresa Harbin, who has always indulged my curious nature. Thank you for raising me to be both confident and fearless. Words cannot express my appreciation for all the emotional labor you put in to support me during this process. I know this journey took quite a toll on you. Thank you for always picking up the phone when I called. I could not have done this without you. I would also like to thank my aunt, Vanessa Harbin, who always provided love, laughter and a comfortable bed in Atlanta when I needed it. I am also grateful for my extended family cheering for me in Oakland, Oklahoma City and Los Angeles.

I would also like to thank my two dissertation co-chairs, Marc Hetherington and Larry Bartels. I feel indebted to each of you for the level of care, support and mentorship you offered over the last three years. The two of you are shining examples of how it is possible to be brilliant, extremely successful and good people too. Thank you for believing in me. To Monique Lyle, I would not be here without you. Thank you for being a model of how to conduct thoughtful work with a deep attention to detail. My work is always made better by your point of view. Also, I would like to John Geer for serving on my committee despite his growing university administration responsibilities.

I would also like to thank Wendy Schiller. I have always admired your fearlessness, resilience and passion for students. I learned so much from just watching you and listening to

your stories. Thank you for supporting me in my move to Vanderbilt. Don Brunson, you taught me so much about academia. Thank you for being a mentor (even though you hate that word) and for always being willing to make a phone call to advocate on my behalf. Also, special thanks to several individuals who participated in a dissertation workshop I hosted my last semester at Vanderbilt: Hye Young You, Carrie Roush, Amanda Clayton, Molly Ritchie and Nara Pavão. My work benefited immensely from you each of you. Thank you for being so generous with your time.

Finally, I would like to thank my chosen family who supported me in this journey. My fellow Smithies: Sarauna Moore, Mika Cade-Lopez, Hope Freeman, Neda Maghbouleh, Sky Chandler, Lillian Carrasquillo, Chloé Pascual, Cristina Jacobs, El Hatch and Janeen Smith. To Andrea Owens-Jones, thank you for taking me under your wing my first year at Brown. We've had so many adventures over the years, I feel lucky to know you and call you a friend. To my best friend, Carlotta Brown, thank you for being my cheerleader all the way from California. I appreciate you always reminding me that I can do anything I decide to do. I am also grateful for the lifelong friendships I made at Vanderbilt especially: Josh Everett, Chelsea Lunn, Mia Keeys, George Castle, Richard Blissett, Brittany Allison, Vivian Finch and Anna Carella. My life is better because each of you is in it.

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In August 2013 New Jersey resident Brian Wilson shared his experience providing medical care for his two-year-old daughter, Vivian, on air with CNN correspondents (Alman 2013). Vivian suffered from a severe form of epilepsy called Dravet Syndrome. The disease caused Vivian to have 300 seizures a day. Mr. Wilson explained that each seizure put Vivian's life at risk because it cut off oxygen to her brain. He also shared that he and his wife exhausted every treatment option currently available in their state. None of them relieved Vivian's seizures. Medical marijuana was the only treatment they found that was effective in reducing the number of seizures. With deep frustration, he lamented that medical marijuana remained illegal in New Jersey (Portney 2013).

At the same time that Wilson's daughter was suffering, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (R) was considering the fate of a medical marijuana bill. The bill, which had been sitting on Christie's desk for two months, outlined which drugs could be administered and detailed the medical authorization requirements for those who wished to use it. Up to that point, Christie expressed reluctance about signing the bill into law. In May 2013, for instance, he was quoted as saying "I'm very concerned. If we go down this slope of allowing minors to use this, where does it end?" (Livio 2013) Three months later Wilson, followed by a group of CNN cameras, confronted Christie at a small political gathering at a diner in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. During the confrontation, Wilson pleaded with the Governor, "Please don't let my daughter die." (Alman 2013)

The video of Christie and Wilson's exchange exploded over television news stations and the internet. Headlines with titles such as "Chris Christie Confronted on Medical Marijuana: 'Please Don't Let My Daughter Die'" dominated the political conversation (Alman 2013). These headlines were accompanied by a continuous loop of the grief-stricken father pleading for his daughter's life. In a short period of time, Wilson's face became a backdrop to political elites' debates about the merits of medical marijuana. Not too long after the confrontation Christie told voters that he would accept the bill if certain changes were made (Ferrigno 2013).

Those reading newspaper headlines about Mr. Wilson's experience may not have realized that his family's story was interjecting a stereotype-inconsistent account of the targets of legalization of medical marijuana legislative proposals. Different from depictions of medical marijuana supporters as individuals attempting to backdoor the legalization of marijuana, the Wilson's story was different. Brian was a father pleading for his daughter's life. From this perspective, he and his family's experience presented a new vantage point for Governor Christie to evaluate the merits of medical marijuana.

I argue stories like that of the Wilson family are a common, yet to date underexplored, tool that political actors employ to influence public opinion about policy matters. The Wilson's story taps American's resolve to protect children from harm. Medical marijuana supporters who seized on this story when discussing legislative proposals interjected a new mental image to picture when considering the merits of legalization. In doing so, medical marijuana advocates were shifting existing debates onto new terms that most Americans would have trouble opposing: providing pain relief to a suffering child.

Consider a second example. On August 22nd 1996, members of Congress, reporters, a select group of presidential appointees, and other allies of the Clinton administration gathered on the

White House lawn to witness President William Jefferson Clinton sign into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (C-SPAN 1996). The legislation was the culmination of political efforts that began when Clinton, still a presidential hopeful, declared his intention to "end welfare as we know it." (Jilani 2015) The ceremony began with a statement from Vice President Albert Gore who referred to the legislation as "an important first step" in what he hoped would be a long-term effort at welfare reform (C-SPAN 1996).

A speech by Lillie Harden, a former welfare recipient from President Clinton's home state of Arkansas, followed Gore's remarks. Ms. Harden, a slightly heavyset dark-skinned African American woman, spoke quickly and with a nervous tone. Her head was tilted forward and her eyes remain fixed on a sheet of paper that contained her speech notes. She told the crowd that she was laid off from her job in 1981. For nearly two years, she was on public assistance. During this time she received a meager $282 each month to take care of her three children.

She recalled how her son Carlton continually pushed her to get back to work. Eventually, she enrolled in Project Success, a welfare reform program Clinton implemented as Governor of Arkansas. She told the crowd that the program taught her how to present herself to get a job she wanted. Two months after completing the training, she landed her first interview. She shared how she has worked ever since. She also described how getting back to work made her feel. Working, she explained, fostered a sense of independence that allowed her to provide for her children and make sure there was always food on the table and a roof over their head. Now her children were thriving. They were now enrolled in college and being recognized for their academic and professional accomplishments.

After Ms. Harden concluded her remarks, Clinton moved to the podium and recounted his memory of when they first met. He shared how Lillie had influenced his thoughts about the proper course of welfare reform after she told him the best part of being off of welfare was: "when my boy goes to school and they ask what his mother does for a living and he can give an answer." Clinton said he had never forgotten that conversation.

For those watching the signing ceremony, Lillie Harden's speech may have been a footnote in their description of the day's events. Rather than focusing on her speech and discussing Clinton's rationale for including her, spectators might hastily recount her story before moving on to summarize the components of the law and final vote tally. Different from this perspective, I argue Ms. Harden's story is yet another example of how political leaders use stories to influence public opinion about policy matters. Harden's story is riddled with implicit moral claims about personal responsibility and work ethic that tap long-standing American political values. Her story conveys lessons about the importance of perseverance, the rewards of working hard and the psychological benefits of work for welfare recipients.

For most Americans, the typical mental image of welfare recipients is an unmarried, African American woman with children (Gilliam Jr 1999). From this perspective, each time Clinton repeated Harden's story, he was invoking a stereotype-consistent depiction of welfare recipients to construct an argument that implementing work requirements can transform the life trajectory of individuals who receive assistance. The basic idea is work requirements motivate the poor to work hard and become self-reliant members of society. Thus, by centering Ms. Harden's story when discussing welfare reform, Clinton was able to illustrate his rationale for supporting the controversial welfare bill.

In this dissertation, I explore storytelling in the political arena and examine how these stories differ from other approaches to political argumentation. First, why would political leaders choose to tell stories? Second, what are the common features of these stories? Third, under what conditions might we expect political stories to influence the electorate? Finally, what effect do these stories have on political beliefs and behavior?

1.2 The Argument

Drawing together work on narrative engagement and affective reasoning, I argue political stories should have a distinct effect on political beliefs and behavior relative to thematic political frames. More specifically, I argue stereotype-inconsistent political stories that positively depict the targets of policy proposals should make individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose the policy more likely to express feeling mentally involved with the storyline than their counterparts who are exposed to thematic political frames. Moreover, these stories should make these individuals more likely to perceive that the story subject matter is relevant to their lives and express empathy toward the targets of policy proposals. I argue this occurs because these stories present unexpected information that provides positive cues about the deservingness of the targets of policy proposals. These positive affective responses, in turn, should lead individuals to rely on perceptions of deservingness rather than their partisan disposition when expressing their policy views.

Stereotype-inconsistent political stories that negatively depict the targets of policy proposals should have the opposite effect. These stories should provide negative cues about the deservingness of the targets of policy proposals that lead individuals to view the targets of policy

proposals as being responsible for their current predicament. These perceptions, in turn, should lead individuals to rely on their negative affective responses to the targets of policy proposals when expressing their policy views. In both cases, however, individuals' affective responses to the targets of policy proposals should influence their subsequent political beliefs and behavior.

Beyond political beliefs and behavior, I expect that presenting information in the narrative format will lead individuals to process political arguments more carefully. I argue this occurs because, from the time they are children, most Americans are socialized to view stories as an important source of moral lessons. Given this socialization, individuals should be more willing to devote time and energy to political issues when these arguments are presented in the narrative format.

1.3 Existing Explanations

A rich and long-spanning literature in political science explores how the electorate forms its views on policy issues. Much of this work focuses on how elite discourse influences the public's thoughts and evaluations of policy issues. In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly review these explanations and discuss how my project builds on work in each area.

1.3.1 Political Framing

Over the last two decades, a vast literature has explored the effect of political frames on attitude formation. In some of the earliest work, Iyengar (1991) finds that individuals were more likely to hold government officials accountable for social problems when news coverage reported on these problems with thematic frames, or frames that discuss public policy issues in

more abstract terms. Following this work, researchers explored how elite framing shapes how people think about political issues and evaluate candidates (Mendelberg 2001; Miller and Krosnick 2000; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997), how individuals' predispositions condition the effect of framing on attitude formation (Chong and Druckman 2007b; Druckman and Nelson 2003) and the duration of framing effects (Druckman et al. 2010).

The main findings of this work suggest that political frames shape how people think about and discuss political issues and evaluate candidates (Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Chong and Druckman 2007b; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997). Moreover, this work suggests that it is the strength of these frames, not the frequency of exposure, that determines whether individuals adopt the values championed by frames (Chong and Druckman 2007a). However, work in this area also suggests the duration of framing effects is relatively short-lived. Still, their effect can be enhanced (or undermined) by engaging in subsequent political discussions, or being a part of a group that presents conflicting perspectives that "cancel out" elite framing effects (Druckman and Nelson 2003). Finally, previous work suggests political frames have the most pronounced effect on those who exhibit a lower need to evaluate. This occurs because these individuals are less likely to hold pre-existing political beliefs and, as a result, are more inclined to rely on elite frames they recently encountered (Druckman and Nelson 2003). More recent work explores framing effects across different policy issues (Brewer and Gross 2005), on emotional responses to policy issues (Gross 2008) and in other national contexts (Ferree 2010; Lecheler and De Vreese 2010).

My call for increased attention to political storytelling is not meant to imply that the study of framing effects is ill advised. To the contrary, there are several similarities between thematic political frames and political stories. First, thematic political frames and political stories

are both interjected by entrepreneurial actors to shape the considerations that individuals use to express their views on policy issues. Indeed, the purpose of thematic political frames and political stories is to make meaning, organize experience and guide action (Benford and Snow 2000; Mayer 2014; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Polletta 2008). Second, both thematic political frames and political stories sometimes recount the experiences of groups in society when discussing broader social and political problems (Delgado 1989; Gottschall 2012; Iyengar 1990, 1991).

Still, the effect of political stories is distinct from that of thematic political frames. While frames and stories both describe the stakes of policy issues in an effort to shape the considerations individuals employ when expressing their views, thematic political frames do so in a relatively superficial manner. These frames shape the considerations that are at the "top of the head" when individuals express their political views. Political stories are different. They chronicle specific experiences and convey moral lessons that lead individuals to devote more cognitive resources to considering the viewpoints presented in these stories. From this perspective, framing effects are fleeting relative to political stories.

1.3.2 Metaphorical Reasoning

Metaphorical reasoning is yet another approach to studying how the electorate forms its views about policy issues. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) argue that human thought processes are largely metaphorical. Metaphors, they assert, are pervasive in everyday life including language, thought and action. They are also culturally contingent. Metaphors, they contend, reflect the most fundamental values in a society and play a central role in defining everyday realities.

Within the world of politics, Lakoff (1996) argues the family is the most powerful metaphor that guides political decision making. More specifically, he contends that liberals and conservatives unconsciously project different models of family into their political thinking. These models give rise to different moral systems that ultimately shape individuals' views about government. At the most basic level, these models determine the language that liberals and conservatives use in political reasoning. Conservatives adopt the "strict father model" which typically results in expressing views about politics in terms of self-reliance, getting tough, individual responsibility, etc. On the other hand, liberals adopt the "nurturant parent model" which often results in expressing views about politics in terms of empathy, social responsibility, equal rights and human dignity. According to this work, political divisions between liberals and conservatives reflect the two groups' conflicting political worldviews.

Similar to framing, work on metaphorical reasoning compliments my work on storytelling. I think of stories as vehicles through which metaphors might be expressed. When metaphors are invoked in stories, they likely reflect the ideological background of the storyteller. For instance, when conservatives share political stories, I would expect that their themes would align with Lakoff's accounts of conservatives' focus on self-reliance and getting tough. Thus, my work on storytelling provides a new vantage point for exploring the prevalence of metaphorical reasoning in the world of politics.

1.3.3 Political Heuristics

Yet another literature in political science explores how heuristics help citizens decipher political arguments and express their political preferences. This work suggests that party cues

are one of the most powerful heuristics in shaping political decision making. For instance, in the *American Voter*, Campbell et al. (1960) argue that parties provide cues that individuals use to evaluate politics. Popkin (1994) contends that voters rely on partisan cues because they don't have much incentive to become well informed. He refers to this phenomenon as "low information rationality."

More recent work explores the effect of heuristics on low and high political sophisticates. Lupia (1994) finds that heuristics allow less politically sophisticated citizens to mimic the behavior of political sophisticates. More specifically, he finds that citizens who lack "encyclopedic information" can utilize information shortcuts such as heuristics to cast the same votes that they would have if they had taken the time to become better informed. However, Lau and Redlawsk (2001) warn that while most people use heuristics, some use them better than others which may lead less knowledgeable voters astray.

Much of the work that explores the effect of political heuristics suggests that voters are "cognitive misers" who prefer heuristics over considering the full range of political arguments that are relevant to a policy issue. My account of political storytelling makes similar assumptions about voters' motivation. Indeed, I argue political storytelling is a rhetorical strategy that allows political actors to present arguments in a format that is highly intuitive to the average voter. Because this format is more intuitive, it helps voters recognize the relevance of policy debates to their own lives and assess the merits of policy proposals from that vantage point.

Thus, different from previous work that has primarily focused on the effect of party labels (Bartels 2002; Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt 1998; Hetherington 2001) and source cues (Albright and Levy 1995; Dentoni et al. 2011; Dholakia and Sternthal 1977; Hovland and Weiss

1951) on decision-making, I argue that it is not only the messenger that matters when it comes to opinion formation. Rather, it is the ability of these messengers to construct messages that engage potential voters. Thus, similar to partisan cues, I argue political stories serve as information shortcuts that provide signals about whether individuals should agree with a policy issue. From this perspective, the effect of political storytelling mirrors Popkin's notion of low information rationality.

1.3.4 Affective Reasoning

Another sizeable literature in political science explores the role of affect in political decision making (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Lodge and Taber 2005; Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen 2000; Sears 2001) . This work suggests that individuals are not neutral processors of political information. Rather, political decision making involves both thinking and feeling. Scholars in this area argue that all political concepts are affectively charged, and as such, political symbols provoke emotions in most people.

One of the earliest articulations of this viewpoint came from Converse (1962) who finds beliefs about African Americans exhibited more centrality than views on any part of government. He argues this occurred because views about government require political information and understanding. Perceptions of African Americans, on the other hand, rely primarily on individuals' affect toward this group. Since Converse's work, most political scientists have come to believe that individuals' affect, or feelings toward groups or issues, is an important component of political evaluations.

There are two main views of the role of affect in the political science literature. The first view contends that individuals employ different decision strategies based on the environment. Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) suggest that when individuals are exposed to political information that is familiar they tend to rely on the "disposition system" which processes routine information. Because individuals do not exhibit feelings of anxiety when encountering familiar concepts they tend to rely on political heuristics in this context. They do so because it does not seem worthwhile to expend energy in these situations. Conversely, exposure to novel political information provokes anxiety that, in turn, makes individuals more likely to abandon heuristics and seek out additional information. In this context, individuals rely on the "surveillance system" which leads people to attend more closely to the stimulus and rely less on habitual thought. In sum, this work suggests that individuals are more inclined to rely on emotions when they encounter familiar information. On the other hand, when they encounter novel information, they are more likely to engage in more reasoned thought.

The second view differs from the first in its outlook on individuals' ability to evaluate political information objectively. Different from Marcus and his colleagues, psychologists suggest that individuals' goals or motives affect how they reason. For instance, Kunda (1990) argues that individuals seek out justifications that support the position they want to defend when expressing their viewpoints. Drawing on this work and applying it to the political world, Lodge and Taber (2005) find that most individuals, particularly those with strong political attitudes, exhibit affective bias when expressing their views about political leaders, groups and issues. Indeed, Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson (2010) find that individuals persist in their affectively influenced evaluations, even in the face of countervailing information, until they reach the "affective tipping point" where it is no longer easy to dismiss evidence that counters

their existing viewpoint. It is only after reaching this point that individuals "stop the process that leads to attitude strengthening and instead begin a process leading to accurate updating." (Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010, 589)

My account of political storytelling suggests that stories may trigger individuals' "affective tipping point" by presenting unexpected information in a familiar format. The essence of my theoretical account is that the presentation of political arguments should increase the role of affective responses in political decision making. Marcus and his colleagues argue that when individuals encounter novel information they are more likely to abandon heuristics and attend more closely to the stimulus and rely less on habitual thought. Drawing on this work, I argue presenting unexpected information in a familiar format should both lead individuals to more carefully consider these arguments and rely on the affective responses that this information provokes.

1.4 Outline of Dissertation

My dissertation project explores the effect of political storytelling on political beliefs and behavior in two issue areas: drug testing for welfare benefits and legalization of medical marijuana. To accomplish this goal, I adopt a sequential mixed methodological approach. First, I employ a content analysis of national news coverage of the two policy issues to pinpoint the range of political arguments present in elite discourse. More specifically, I identify thematic political frames and political stories that materialized in national news coverage. I present these findings in Chapter Three. Next, I use the political stories I identified in the content analysis to create stimuli for the second part of my research design: a series of focus group meetings. The

purpose of these meetings is to conduct an initial anecdotal test of my concept of political storytelling. I present these findings in Chapter Four. I use my observations from these meetings to inform the final component of my research design: a survey experiment. The purpose of this survey experiment is to isolate the causal effect of political stories on political beliefs, behavior and information processing. I present these findings in Chapter Five. In Chapter 6 I summarize my findings and discuss the benefits (and perils) of political storytelling. I also discuss how storytelling might be a tool for building bridges of commonality between Democrats and Republicans. I conclude with a brief discussion of my next steps in this project.

CHAPTER TWO: STEREOTYPES, STORYTELLING AND PERSUASION IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

2.1 Overview

From the time we are children, most Americans are exposed to storytelling (Gottschall 2012). Stories impart important moral lessons. They suggest a proper course of action and the difference between right and wrong. Stories shape young children of all backgrounds' perception of the world. Stories are a common cultural experience. Recent work in psychology and neuroscience suggests that our brains may even be wired for story (Cron 2012). For instance, cognitive psychologists suggest that narrative accounts of human behavior produce a "vivid simulation of reality" that gives readers an opportunity to "enter fully into other people's thoughts and feelings." (Paul 2012) Researchers refer to this effect as theory-of-mind (ToM) or "mentalizing." Work in this area suggests there are distinct regions of the brain activated by story and non-story based information. For instance, in a meta-analysis of several studies Mar (2011) finds that researchers repeatedly find that mentalizing is facilitated through the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex and precuneus and bilateral temporoparietal junction.

While stories have influenced beliefs and behavior for centuries, I study their influence in the contemporary American political context. Following Shenhav (2015) I define political stories as a chronological account of events related to public policy and governance that include characters. The purpose of these stories is to illustrate the targets of policy proposals, attribute causes to policy problems and influence the public's thoughts about the appropriate policy solution.

Political stories form imprints in our minds. Mayer (2014) argues "narrative is fundamental to memory." (2014, 67) According to Mayer, stories are easier for individuals to remember. Rather than recalling a series of details or facts, we remember stories that remind us how we should think and feel about issues when we are asked our opinion or presented with new facts (Simmons 2006). Moreover, stories "allow us to infer a great deal from relatively little" (Mayer 2014, 69). Lupia (2013) argues that the primary challenge of communicating science to broader audiences is that most individuals view this information as "needlessly abstract, loaded with jargon and disconnected from their lives." (2013, 2) In the world of politics, this disconnect is problematic because research suggests voters do not pay attention to issues unless they are moved by them. Indeed, Westen (2008) asserts "We do not find policies worth debating if they don't touch on the emotional implications for ourselves, our families, or things we hold dear." (xx)

I argue political storytelling makes political arguments more accessible. Without us knowing it, stories connect the dots in our mind. Think about driving down an unfamiliar road. Without a navigation system, you would likely make several wrong turns, become flustered, and spend a frustrating amount of time asking for directions from locals. If your plans for the day were unimportant, you would likely head back home after becoming annoyed with confusing directions and difficult-to-decipher road signs. On the other hand, with a navigation system, you would easily move through the new streets and perhaps even arrive at your destination early. Stories act as a navigation system. They highlight the facts that are most important to consider. In doing so, they guide how we think about policy problems and issues.

In this chapter I lay the theoretical groundwork for my concept of political storytelling. I begin by discussing work by cognitive psychologists on the effect of narrative information on

memory and knowledge structures. I then discuss the three core components of political stories: characters, moral principles and political values. Next, I recount work on narrative engagement, persuasion and political behavior. I then discuss the ways that political stories are conveyed to the public. I conclude by laying out the scope conditions of my concept of political storytelling and my expectations of how stories influence the electorate.

2.2 The Cognitive Psychology of Storytelling

The narrative format is a rhetorical approach whose aim to is to communicate knowledge, feelings, values and beliefs to an audience (Phelan 1996). We organize our experience and memories of events in the form of narrative—including stories and myths (Bruner 1991). We also justify action (and inaction) using the narrative format. Narratives are transmitted culturally. They present, as well as construct, a particular version of reality. In other words, narratives can be thought of as a "particular style of epistemology." (Bruner 1991, 15)

Previous research suggests individuals incorporate narrative information into their pre-existing knowledge which, in turn, affects real-world judgements. For instance, Gerrig (1993) finds that unless individuals are specifically instructed to scrutinize information they will incorporate narrative details into non-narrative knowledge structures. Indeed, he observes that individuals "appear to form new memory modes to serve as the foci for story information even when those nodes reproduce preexisting concepts." (Gerrig 1993, 215)

Rhetorical arguments that employ the narrative format are influential in the world of politics. For instance, Iyengar finds that news coverage reported with episodic frames, or frames

that focus on specific events or particular cases, cause individuals to become less inclined to hold public officials accountable for social problems and their solutions. He argues individuals become less likely to hold public officials accountable because episodic frames impart contextual clues that send messages about who is responsible for social problems. Following this work, scholars for the most part abandoned the study of episodic frames. Scholars' thinking was that if episodic frames made citizens less inclined to hold government officials responsible for policy problems, then the work of scholars should be to investigate the nuts and bolts of thematic political frames, or frames that discuss public policy issues in more abstract terms.

Different from other work in this area, I argue there is tremendous value in the empirical study of episodic frames. However I contend that "episodic frame" is political science terminology for a more familiar and widely sanctioned practice in the political arena: storytelling. Stone (1989) contends that political actors use stories to attribute cause, blame and responsibility in the political arena. She argues political actors deliberately portray policy problems in calculated ways to elicit support for their proposed policy solution. According to Stone, these stories describe harms and difficulties, attribute blame to individuals or organizations and, in doing so, legitimate a particular form of government intervention to prevent further harm. For instance, Strange and Leung (1999) find the more individuals become engaged in stories that portray the causes of students dropping out of school, the more likely they are to generate both causes and solutions consistent with the causes emphasized in the story they read. It is important to note that these stories may also be used to justify inaction on the part of government officials.

Thus, different from Iyengar, Stone's work suggests stories can be constructed in ways that actually make it easier for the electorate to attribute blame for policy problems. In my

project, I adjudicate these rival explanations by examining the rate at which individuals blame the government for the predicament faced by specific groups after reading political stories that convey information about these individuals and the obstacles they face.

It is important to note that Stone's concept of story differs from the one that I employ in this project, although we are investigating the same general phenomenon: how political actors use the narrative format to express political arguments. Stone focuses on stories as a means to strategically define problems. In her work the definition of stories and their function are one and the same. Stories convey interpretations of the causes of policy problems. I build on Stone's work by disentangling the definition and function of stories. I define political stories as chronological accounts of events that include characters. I then test the effect of these stories on political beliefs, behavior and information processing.

Drawing on work by Schank and Berman (2002) I expect that at least five types of political stories could possibly emerge in elite discourse surrounding my policy issues. *Official stories* are created by those in authority to portray a version of events that minimize their culpability in policy problems. *Invented stories* are constructed from elements of stories from individuals' past experiences or stories they have heard before. *Firsthand stories* provide an account of individuals' personal experiences. *Secondhand stories* are stories individuals hear and then repeat. *Culturally common stories* are general stories that are pervasive in society and can be applied in a variety of contexts. It may be the case that stories that emerge in my analysis fit into multiple categories. For instance, an invented story might also be a secondhand story. The important point is that there are different types of stories that might emerge in any given policy area.

2.3 The Components of Political Stories

I emphasize three core components of political stories in my analysis. First, I identify **characters** featured in the storyline. There is a wide array of characters that might be featured in stories. For instance, characters might be ordinary citizens. However, within this category we might focus on a specific subset of citizens such as California residents, registered voters, Republican voters, women, African Americans, etc. The possibilities are endless. I categorize the choice of story characters as **stereotype-consistent** or **stereotype-inconsistent**. Stereotype-consistent story characters restate common perceptions of the targets of policy proposals. On the other hand, stereotype-inconsistent story characters are less predictable depictions of the targets of policy proposals.

I also explore the **moral principles** championed in political stories. Vitz (1990) argues narrative materials are an "essential component of effective moral education." (1990, 709) Indeed, parents and teachers frequently use stories to convey moral lessons to young children (Gottschall 2012; Simmons 2006). As it relates to the world of politics, there are several moral principles that predominate in political thinking. These principles include lessons about community responsibility for vulnerable members of society, shared expectations of citizens regarding work, etc. The possibilities are numerous.

Finally, I examine the American political values invoked in political stories. Values are a metric individuals use to determine, as well as justify, their actions. Within the political context, **political values** help ordinary citizens, as well as political leaders, evaluate issues, people and events (Chong 1993, 2000, Feldman 1988, 2003; Tetlock 1986). For instance, Tetlock (1986)

contends that policy issues that give rise to conflicting values prompt individuals to update their reasoning and shift their political beliefs.

Previous work on narrative argumentation varies considerably in its emphasis on the literary devices employed in stories. For instance, some scholars suggest that stories must contain literary devices such as a plot, complication and resolution (Bruner 1991; Green and Brock 2000; Polletta 2006). Different from this work, I employ a minimalist concept of political stories. My primary interest is in identifying a wide range of stories that emerged in policy debates and exploring the effect of these stories on political beliefs, behavior and information processing. The fluid nature of political debates means that storytelling is constantly adapting to reflect the current political context. Thus, what might begin as a comment in passing about an individual experience may over time evolve into a detailed account of how a series of events influenced an individual's life. The latter category of stories likely utilizes a wider array of narrative devices than the former; however, both would play a role in constructing an individual's understanding of a policy issue. From this perspective, if I adopted too rigid criteria for literary devices I might systematically overlook the earliest articulations of political stories. For this reason, I adopt a minimalist concept of political stories in my analysis.

Consider an example of a narrative (political story) and non-narrative (thematic political frame) arguments that I identified in the current analysis. Both arguments relate to the claim that medical marijuana should be legalized because it has the potential to ease the pain of several medical diagnoses.

Example 1: Pain Relief Thematic Political Frame

> The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia has clearly defined that marijuana is not a medicine. The National Institutes of Health have reviewed the

> issue and determined that crude marijuana adds nothing to the treatment of sick patients, actually adds risk to patients and has no scientifically proven benefits over existing medicines. Neither the American Cancer Society nor the American Medical Association supports smoking marijuana as medicine (Voth 1996).

The first example is a thematic political frame. In this example, legalization opponents reference rulings by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and the National Institute of Health (NIH) to argue that marijuana does not enhance the treatment plan of sick patients and has no scientifically proven benefits over existing medications. Legalization opponents use these findings to suggest that medical marijuana may actually put sick patients at greater risk. In fact, they rely on readers' perception of the credibility of the Court and the NIH's findings to defend their claim that marijuana should not be legalized for medical use.

Example 2: Pain Relief Political Story

> Anna Boyce, 66, a registered nurse, says her husband would have died of cancer complications much sooner if she hadn't persuaded him to smoke marijuana to prevent nausea after his chemotherapy. ``John was about 70 and a very upright, law-abiding man," she says. ``It made him feel so bad to break the law, but it helped him eat. It gave us several more precious months together." Her husband died last year. Boyce is going to nursing homes and senior clubs to convince the elderly that pot is good medicine. ``They know we can help their suffering," says Dennis Peron of Californians for Compassionate Use, the group behind the initiative (Goodavage 1996).

The second example is a political story that details the experiences of Anna Boyce, a registered nurse, and her husband who died of cancer. In the story, John is described as a "very upright and law-abiding man" who felt bad about having to break the law to smoke marijuana after his chemotherapy. Though he felt bad about breaking the law, Anna explains, marijuana helped him eat and gave the couple "several more precious months together." In the story we learn that Anna has been traveling to nursing homes and senior clubs to share her and John's

story. Her goal in sharing her firsthand account of the medicinal benefits of marijuana is to provide information to other elderly individuals who may be suffering with chronic disease.

Thus, different from the thematic political frame example, Anna and John's political story paints a picture of who stands to benefit from the legalization of medical marijuana. In doing so, it undermines stereotypes of marijuana users that cast these individuals as moral deviants. The story undermines this characterization by providing a counter example of a cancer patient who benefited from medical marijuana. John was far from a hippy stoner. He was a law-abiding citizen who felt guilty about smoking marijuana. Yet he needed it. From this perspective, Anna and John's story establishes a new vantage point for thinking through the merits of medical marijuana: law-abiding citizens, cancer patients and the elderly. Indeed, Anna and John's story likely made it easier for elderly individuals to envision how their own medical circumstances might improve by using medical marijuana.

2.4 Disciplinary Perspectives on Narrative Persuasion

A vast literature in the fields of communication studies and psychology explores the effect of narrative text on information processing, beliefs and behavior. Some of the earliest work in communication studies was conducted by Walter Fisher (1984) who interjects a "narrative paradigm of communication" that synthesizes two rhetorical and literary traditions: argumentation and aesthetics (also see Fisher 1985, 1987). Fisher's narrative paradigm challenges the claim that human communication can only be considered rhetorical if it is presented in the argumentative form with "clearly identifiable modes of interference and/or implication" that mimic informal or formal logic (Fisher 1984, 2). The narrative paradigm of

communication, he contends, does not deny reason and rationality; rather, it "reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication." (Fisher 1984, 2)

For Fisher, narrative rationality assumes that humans are "essentially storytellers" and make decisions based on "good reasons" that are ruled by historical, cultural and biographical considerations and may vary in different communication situations (Fisher 1984, 8-9). He argues that good reasons are informed by individuals' innate awareness of *narrative probability* and *narrative fidelity*. Narrative probability is an assessment of how well a story "hangs together." (Fisher 1987, 47) This assessment is based on three factors: the coherence of the argument, its soundness relative to other stories that appear in discourse and the believability of the characters. According to Fisher, perceptions of story characters are based on whether characters' decisions and actions are consistent with (or contradict) their values. When these values fail to cohere, individuals tend to question story characters and are less inclined to accept the message being conveyed through the narrative. Thus, the most persuasive narratives are those that feature reliable and consistent characters.

Narrative fidelity is an assessment of whether the components of a story "represent accurate assertions about social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief or action." (Fisher 1987, 105) Fisher argues that humans follow an implicit logic when assessing whether a story has a compelling reason for belief, attitude or action. There are five components of this logic. First, individuals consider whether statements in stories are, in actuality, "facts." Second, individuals assess whether relevant facts have been omitted or distorted in the text. Third, individuals recognize and assess the patterns of reasoning using informal logic. Fourth, individuals assess the relevance of arguments to the message subject matter. Finally, individuals judge whether the message addresses the "real" issues in the cases.

According to Fisher, this logic of reasons gets transformed into a logic of "good reasons" through a five-step test of narrative fidelity that includes questions such as "What are the values embedded in the message?", "Are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon?" and "What would be the effects of adhering to the values for one's concept of oneself, one's behavior, for one's relationship with others and society and to the process of rhetorical transaction?" (Fisher 1987, 109) Listeners and readers apply each of the aforementioned questions to determine whether they should adjust their beliefs, attitudes and action. Given its emphasis on perceptions of coherence and feasibility, narrative rationality is thought to rely on *identification* rather than deliberation as the main mechanism for persuasion.

Upon its release, Fisher's concept of narrative paradigm was heavily critiqued by scholars who argued his definition of narrative was too broad. These critics also worried about what they perceived as Fisher's inadequate attention to the issue of false stories that are believed by large segments of society and may, as a result, prove harmful (Rowland 1987). Moreover, critics questioned how narrative text can possibly challenge prevailing beliefs if narrative fidelity requires that this text "rings true" with their existing experience (Kirkwood 1985). Despite these critiques, most scholars acknowledge the important contribution of Fisher's work: it interjected a descriptive framework for scholars to conceptualize narratives as a form of argumentation (Stroud 2014).

Since Fisher, researchers have continued to develop scholarly understanding of how narrative information is processed relative to non-narrative information. According to this work, non-narrative rhetorical strategies, such as thematic political frames or partisan cues, are processed "centrally" or "peripherally." (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) Stories follow a third process: immersion (Green and Brock 2000; Polletta 2008). Indeed, work in this area contends

that individuals become immersed in storylines as they attempt to experience vicariously the events and emotions of story characters. Scholars typically refer to this phenomenon as narrative engagement.

For instance, M. C. Green and Brock (2000) argue that the narrative format mutes the skepticism that individuals typically exhibit when encountering new information. This occurs because individuals become less conscious of claims that contradict the position being advocated in stories. The decreasing awareness of claims that contradict the position advocated in the story is what scholars refer to as "immersion." Work by psychologists in this area suggests that as individuals become more "immersed" in the storyline, they become less likely to exhibit negative cognitive responses. Most frequently scholars measure the effect of one subtype of narrative engagement on beliefs and behavior: transportation. Transportation refers to "an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings, focused on story events." (Green and Brock 2000)

Using the transportation scale developed by Green and Brock, several researchers have shown the narrative format increases levels of transportation and influences attitude formation (Appel and Richter 2010; Banerjee and Greene 2012, 2012, Green 2004, 2006; Green, Brock, and Kaufman 2004; Green, Chatham, and Sestir 2012; Murphy et al. 2013; Slater and Rouner 2002). Several recent studies suggest that the transportation scale may actually work on two dimensions: story involvement and story impact (see, for instance, Oliver et al. 2012). Story involvement refers to feeling mentally involved with the subject matter of the text. On the other hand, story impact refers to believing the story subject matter is relevant to one's life.

It is important to note that work in this area has operationalized involvement in several different ways (Johnson and Eagly 1989; Moyer-Gusé 2008). As previously mentioned, one way that story involvement is operationalized is individuals' feelings of being mentally involved with

the subject matter of the text. A second operationalization is self-reported feelings of identifying with the story character (Slater 2002). Within this categorization, researchers have implemented several different conceptualizations of identification including wanting to be life a character (wishful identification), desire to be like a character (often referred to as homophily) and positive evaluations of a character (Moyer-Gusé 2008) and issue involvement (Petty and Cacioppo 1979). In the current study I adopt the most common operationalization of involvement: feelings of being mentally involved with the subject matter of the text (also referred to as transportation).

Finally, work that explores narrative persuasion points to affective responses as a potential explanatory mechanism (Green and Brock 2000; Green, Chatham, and Sestir 2012; Oliver et al. 2012). Previous work suggests that as individuals become more absorbed in storylines, they are more likely to express story consistent feelings such as sympathy and compassion. For instance, Oliver et al. (2012) find that news stories on stigmatized groups in society that are presented in the narrative format initiate empathic processes that lead individuals to express more favorable evaluations of stigmatized groups (also see Batson et al. 1997, 2002). More specifically, they find that narrative-formatted stories evoke individuals' feelings of compassion that, in turn, lead individuals to express empathy toward these groups. This empathy effect appears to persist over time (Shen, Ahern, and Baker 2014).

The effect of political storytelling goes beyond influencing attitude formation: stories also affect political behavior. Delgado (1989) argues stories can spur participation among members of marginalized groups in society. Stories, he explains, create bonds among group members, construct shared understandings and meanings. Stories can also help us understand when there is a need to reallocate power (also see Polletta 2006). Selbin (2010) similarly

suggests that stories provide a means for individuals to communicate collective needs and grievances. More recently, Mayer (2014) argues the narrative format can help overcome the free rider problem by constructing shared understanding that helps members of a community "imagine how they should behave…define the form that cooperation should take…[and] commit ourselves to cooperate." (2014, 9)

In the current project, I draw on the work of communications and psychology scholars and apply it to the current world of politics. More specifically, drawing on the narrative engagement theoretical framework, I expect individuals who are exposed to political information presented in the narrative format will be more likely to express feeling that they are mentally engaged with story content and report that the story subject matter is relevant to their lives. At the same time, I expect that simply presenting information in the narrative format will increase the mental resources individuals' are willing to devote to processing this information. My expectation is derived from previous work that suggests individuals exhibit less skepticism when exposed to political storytelling because these stories are a relatively familiar cultural practice that is intuitive to most Americans. In other words, I argue political stories should be a means for overcoming the attention problem described by Westen and Lupia.

2.5 Conveying Political Stories to the Public

There are several ways that political stories might be conveyed to the public. Politicians tell stories to illustrate the stakes of public policy issues and the purpose of government programs. Journalists tell stories to help audiences understand complex social and political

issues. Individuals who overhear these stories often repeat them to friends, family and coworkers. Stories are everywhere.

In my analysis, I focus on political stories that emerge in elite discourse. When I refer to political elites, I mean the vast array of political leaders or groups who participate in debates surrounding policy issues. These individuals include elected officials, grassroots activists, religious leaders, interest groups, etc. I am also referring to journalists and political commentators who summarize the content of these debates and report them to the public.

I focus on elite discourse because existing research suggests debates between political elites encourage individuals to think about issues in particular ways (Carmines and Stimson 1990; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Zaller 1992). For instance, Zaller (1992) argues that elite discourse conveys persuasive and cueing messages to the public. Persuasive messages provide reasons for taking a position. If individuals accept these messages, they form the considerations that are taken into account when expressing views on political outcomes. Cueing messages facilitate this learning by providing contextual information about the ideological or partisan implications of persuasive messages.

The public is typically exposed to these debates through television news programs, newspapers, public speeches, talk radio and other forms of mass media. Indeed, previous work suggests the media constructs the public's understanding of social issues (Schudson 2003). For instance, Mutz (1992) finds individuals' retrospective economic assessments are influenced by newspaper coverage that shapes individuals' perceptions of unemployment as a national issue rather than a personal problem. Zaller argues that news coverage often alters the mix of ideas individuals take into account when expressing their viewpoints (Zaller 1992). Given this work, I

identify political stories featured in news coverage in my analysis and use these stories to test the effect of storytelling on political belief, behavior and information processing.

2.6 Political Storytelling and Persuasion

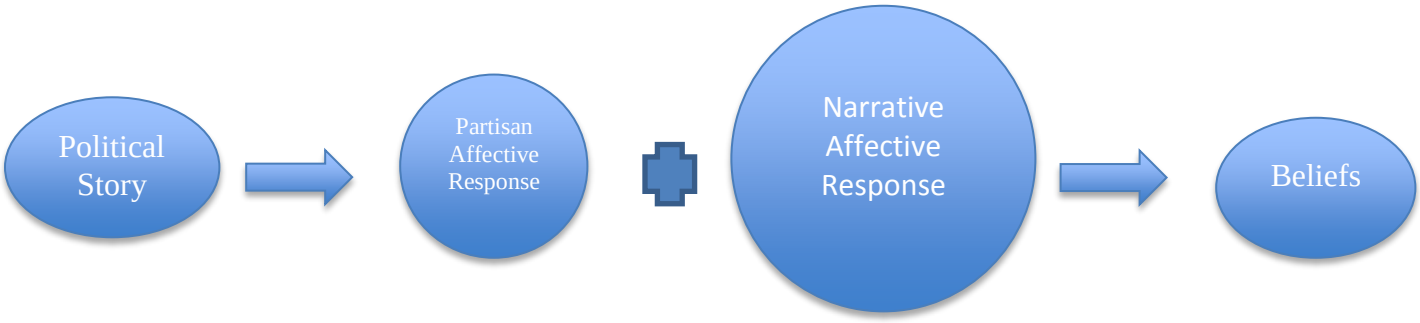
To this point I have argued that political storytelling should influence how individuals process the information presented in these stories and may provoke emotional reactions that influence individuals' political beliefs and behavior. However, in my theoretical account of political storytelling, I emphasize the effect of narrative political arguments on individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose a policy measure. I chose this focus in light of Hetherington and Rudolph's (2015) recent finding that Americans are increasingly polarized in their policy preferences and feelings about political opponents. This work highlights the need for scholars to begin identifying the terms under which individuals from opposing sides of the political spectrum are able to forge political commonality. Political storytelling may be one such tool for moving beyond this impasse. Storytelling's status as a culturally shared practice, together with its tendency to disarm the skepticism individuals exhibit when encountering information, make it an ideal tool for political leaders concerned about the damaging effect of polarization on the policymaking process.

The extant literature suggests partisans, especially those who are less politically aware, tend to rely on partisan cues to determine how they should feel about policy issues when presented with non-narrative political information (e.g. Kam 2005). Figure 1 illustrates this relationship.

Figure 1: Partisan-Affect Based Decision Making

I argue partisans should behave differently when exposed to narrative format political information. Because stories disarm the typical skepticism individuals' exhibit when encountering information and tend to evoke emotional responses to story content, partisans should be more likely to rely on their narrative affective responses when presented with political information in the narrative format. However, it is important to acknowledge that partisanship likely still plays some role in decision making. In my theoretical account, I simply argue the effect size of partisan affective responses should be diminished. Figure 2 illustrates this relationship.

Figure 2: Narrative-Affect Based Decision Making



As I noted earlier, I emphasize the effect of narrative political arguments on individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose a given policy measure. I argue there are four scope conditions in which political storytelling will be most effective in influencing attitude formation among these individuals.

- First, political storytelling should be most effective when there are not entrenched partisan differences on the policy issue.

For political storytelling to be effective it must be possible to influence attitude formation. Given this, the effect of political storytelling is likely limited to policy areas where there are not fundamental disagreements between the two major parties. Indeed, partisan attachments are so strong on issues like abortion and gun control that it is unlikely that partisans will be swayed by even the most compelling political story. Recent debates surrounding gun control in the wake of Sandy Hook and other mass shootings provide evidence in support of this scope condition (LaPierre 2012).

- Second, political storytelling should be most effective when the policy issue is of personal relevance to audience members.

Policy issues that may one day affect individuals make it easier for audience members to imagine themselves as beholden to policy proposals. Narrative psychologists refer to this effect as "story impact." Thus, the effect of political storytelling should be increasingly pronounced as the subject matter is believed to be pertinent to one's personal life.

- Third, political storytelling should be most effective when the cause of the underlying social problem that policy proposals are meant to address can be conveyed in a relatively straightforward manner.

It can be fairly difficult to convey complex causality through stories. Conveying complex causality often requires a large cast of characters to fully illustrate the general circumstances and motivation of different actors. Consequently, these stories may be lengthy and difficult to navigate. By the end of the story, readers may be unable to recall the details of the stories. Moreover, they may be uncertain of who to blame in a given situation. On the other hand, straightforward causes make it easier for storytellers to craft stories. Straightforward causes also make it easier for audience members to remember the lesson conveyed in the story. For these reasons, political storytelling should be most effective when the cause of an underlying social problem can be communicated in a relatively straightforward manner.

- Finally, political storytelling should be most effective when story characters counter existing stereotypes of the targets of policy proposals and are depicted in a positive manner.

Drawing on work by Bergan (2012) who finds that citizens are more likely to express support for policies after viewing information from sources that impart unexpected information, I hypothesize that political stories that present stereotype-inconsistent portrayals of the targets of policy proposals that are positive should lead individuals to view the targets of policy proposals as more deserving of help (Applebaum 2001). This perception of deservingness, in turn, should lead individuals to express positive affective responses toward the targets of policy proposals.

However, when these stories depict the targets of policy proposals negatively, individuals should be more likely to blame the targets of policy proposals for their current predicament. In both cases, these perceptions should influence subsequent attitude formation and behavior.

Applebaum (2001) finds that if people are perceived as being responsible for their current predicament, individuals tend to view them as deserving of their condition. Being responsible for their predicament is determined by whether the cause of the predicament is within an individuals' control and therefore determined by their behavioral choices. For instance, Feather and Dawson (1998) find that research subjects who were exposed to an individual who exhibited high effort in finding a job were more likely to perceive this person as responsible for (and deserving of) their success than research subjects who were exposed to individuals who exhibited low effort. Petersen et al. (2011) suggest evaluations of deservingness are automatically activated when relevant cues are present. In fact, Petersen and his colleagues find that perceptions of deservingness can crowd out the effect of political values on policy evaluations. I use this work as the theoretical basis for my account of the effect of stereotype-inconsistent political stories on political beliefs and behavior.

Beyond the effect of story characters on beliefs and behavior, I expect that political stories will influence blame attributions. In my analysis, I will adjudicate two rival explanations of the effect of presenting arguments in the narrative format on attributions of responsibility. Iyengar's work suggests that individuals will be less likely to hold the government responsible for social problems when presented with political information in the narrative format. Stone, on the other hand, suggests that stories are a means to more clearly define the causes of policy problems and attribute blame. I test these rival explanations in my empirical analysis.

2.7 Conclusion

In the chapters that follow I further develop and test each of these scope conditions. In the next chapter, I explore political storytelling in two separate policy domains. For each policy issue, I conduct a content analysis of national newspapers to identify the thematic political frames and political stories that materialized in elite discourse. I then provide a thick description of the narrative (political stories) and non-narrative (thematic political frames) arguments that emerged in this discourse. I speculate about how these stories likely influenced public opinion during the period of analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: TWO CASE STUDIES OF STORYTELLING IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

3.1 Overview

In the previous chapter, I defined political stories as chronological accounts of events related to public policy and governance that include characters. I asserted that political leaders use stories to illustrate the targets of policy proposals, attribute causes to policy problems and influence the public's thoughts about appropriate policy solutions. Drawing on work by psychologists and communication scholars, I argued that political stories should lead individuals to feel more mentally involved with the story subject matter. Moreover, these stories should increase the likelihood that individuals perceive that the story subject matter is relevant to their lives. Finally, I argued that political stories that feature a stereotype-inconsistent portrayal of the targets of policy proposals that is positive (negative) should lead individuals who are predisposed to oppose a policy issue to perceive story characters as morally un(deserving) of their

circumstances. These perceptions, in turn, should evoke positive (negative) emotions responses toward the targets of policy proposals. I suggested these affective responses should influence subsequent political beliefs and behavior.

In this chapter, I examine the political stories that emerged in debates surrounding two policy issues: state legislative proposals to implement drug testing for welfare benefits and legalize medical marijuana. My goal is to provide a thick description of the political stories that materialized in elite discourse. In my account of these stories I describe the characters, moral principles and political values featured in these storylines.

The results of my content analysis of nine national newspapers reveal three story themes were present in news coverage of drug testing for welfare benefits between 2009 and 2014: Reality of Drug Use, Protection of Rights and Stigmatizing the Poor. I identified three political story themes in coverage of legalization of medical marijuana between 1994 and 2014: Pain Relief, Fear of Prosecution and Federal versus States Rights. The findings of my content analysis reveal vast differences in the quantity of political stories that emerged in each policy area as well as the range of characters featured. I suspect this pattern reflects differences in the extent to which collective understandings of these policy issues exist. Most Americans have a clearly defined portrait of welfare recipients in their minds whereas the mental image of medical marijuana patients is less crystalized in the mind of the average citizen.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I describe my rationale for choosing drug testing for welfare benefits and legalization of medical marijuana as policy case studies. Second, I provide a brief background to these legislative proposals. Third, I define the methodological approach I employed to investigate political storytelling in each policy area. Next, I describe the political stories featured in national news coverage, including the characters,

moral principles and underlying political values. I then discuss what these stories tell us about political actors' perceptions of the underlying social problem and the proper course of policy solutions. I conclude by summarizing the main takeaways of my content analysis and providing a brief overview of how these findings informed the next component of my research design: a series of focus group meetings.

3.2 Why Drug Testing and Legalization of Medical Marijuana

I employ two policy case studies in my research design: drug testing for welfare benefits and legalization of medical marijuana. I selected these policy issues using Carmines and Stimson's (1980) concept of "easy" policy issues. Easy issues meet four criteria. First, they are symbolic rather than technical. They are issues that can be easily presented and understood by citizens. Second, easy issues typically engage the ends of public policy not the means. Third, easy issues are typically unresolved conflicts that have long been on the political agenda. Finally, easy issues are, for the most part, ephemeral; sometimes they are offered to the electorate and at other times, they are not.

Both of my policy issues satisfy the easy issue criteria. Legislative proposals in both areas have been relatively symbolic. State lawmakers who championed drug testing procedures in states like Maine and Florida lamented the need to reduce drug abuse; however, these statements never delved into the technical discussions of how these policies would actually curb drug addiction. The same can be said of grassroots efforts to legalize medical marijuana especially in the earliest years. Elite discourse typically focused on presenting anecdotal evidence of medical patients who said their symptoms were improved by using marijuana.

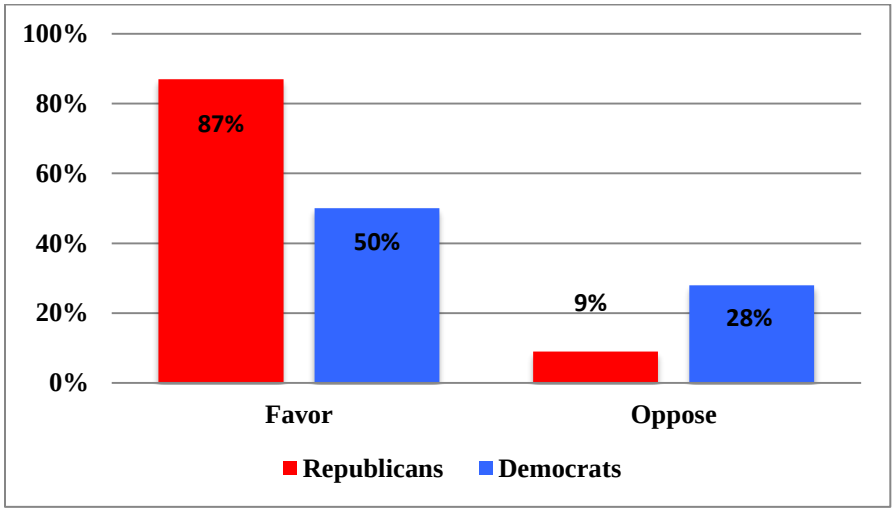
However, for the most part, these debates did not delve into the medical science of how specific properties of marijuana improved individuals' ability to function. Instead, legislative proposals focused on the policy ends: deny benefits to welfare recipients who use illicit drugs and allow medical patients to access marijuana for medical purposes. In these discussions, many questions remain about the technical aspects of how these legislative proposals would be carried out. For example, how is suspicion-based drug testing carried out on the ground? Second, what criteria will be used to evaluate applications to open a state-sanctioned medical marijuana dispensary? Third, both drug testing and medical marijuana proposals have been unresolved issues on the political agenda since the 1970s and 80s. Finally, both policies have exhibited ebbs and flows in attention that has been devoted to passing legislative proposals. The first foray into drug testing beneficiaries of public assistance was introduced in the late 1980s. The second attempt came ten years later. The first contemporary attempt to legalize medical marijuana came in the 1970s. Then, owing to the HIV epidemic, the second attempt came in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A third wave of efforts to legalize medical marijuana materialized in the late 2000s. I dig deeper into each policy history in the next section of this chapter.

Carmines and Stimson argue that easy issues are ingrained enough in elite discourse that voters can easily rely on their gut reactions when expressing their viewpoints rather than seeking out more information about the policy positions of political elites who resemble their issue preferences. I focus on this subset of policy issues because even the most unsophisticated voter is likely to have a well-formed opinion in these issue areas. From this perspective, my "easy issue" case studies should allow me to better generalize about the effect of storytelling on both low and high political sophisticates.

Before turning to the historical background of my policy case studies, it is important to speak concretely to the partisan divides that exist on these issues. Because voters are more likely to rely on their "gut reactions" to easy issues, it is imperative that I establish that there are clear signals of the partisan divisions in each of these policy areas. To speak to this question, I collected public opinion data that provides a snapshot of partisan patterns of support for each issue.

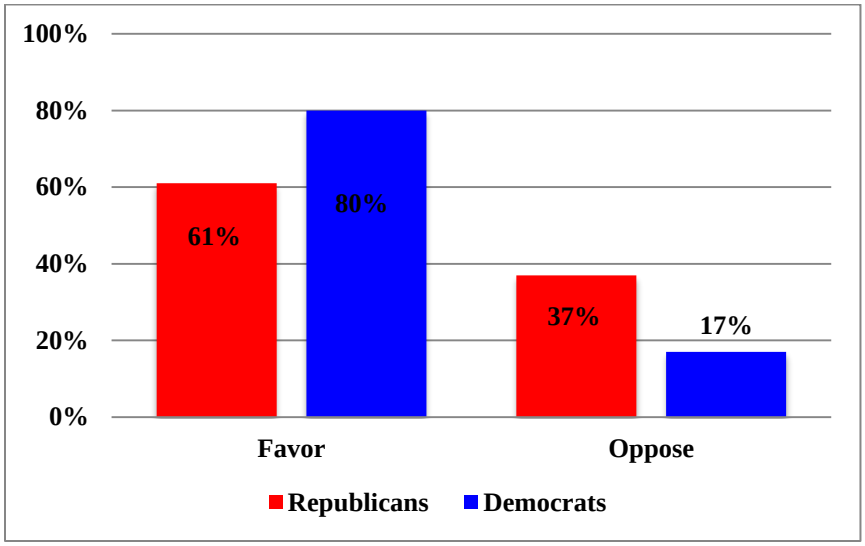
A *YouGov* poll conducted in November 2013 reveals a divide in Republican and Democratic support for random drug testing of welfare recipients. Survey respondents were asked: "Do you favor or oppose requiring the following groups of people to submit to random drug testing?" Welfare recipients. As Figure 3 suggests, there are partisan differences in support for random testing of welfare recipients. Eighty-seven percent of Republicans reported that they either "Favor strongly" or "Favor somewhat" random drug testing of welfare recipients. On the other hand, only 50 percent of Democrats reported that they either "Favor strongly" or "Favor somewhat" random drug testing of welfare recipients. Also important to note is the sizeable proportion of Democrats who expressed ambivalent attitudes toward drug testing proposals. These individuals may be more receptive to storytelling because their partisan affective responses are likely less pronounced than their counterparts who express more crystalized views.

Figure 3: Support for Random Drug Testing of Welfare Recipients



Views on the legalization of medical marijuana reveal similar, albeit less sharp, divides across partisan affiliation. In a survey administered by the Pew Center in 2010, participants were asked: "Do you favor or oppose your state allowing the sale and use of marijuana for medical purposes if it is prescribed by a doctor?" As Figure 4 illustrates, 61 percent of Republicans reported that they favor allowing the sale and use of marijuana for medical purposes. In the same survey, 80 percent of Democrats reported that they favor allowing the sale and use of marijuana for medical purposes.

Figure 4: Support for Sale and Use of Marijuana for Medical Use



3.3 Background to Policy Case Studies

3.3.1 Drug Testing for Welfare Benefits

As of March 2016, fifteen states have passed legislation that mandates drug screening of public assistance applicants or recipients (NCSL 2015). These states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia and Wisconsin. Table 1 presents the year each state adopted drug testing measures and the inaugural legislation.

Table 1: Drug Testing for Welfare Benefits Policies Enacted (by State)

State	Date Enacted	Legislation
Alabama	April 10, 2014	SB 63
Arkansas	April 8, 2015	SB 600

Arizona	April 6, 2011	S. 1620
Florida	May 31, 2011	HB 353
Georgia	April 16, 2012	HB 861 Revised HB 772
Kansas	April 16, 2013	SB 149
Michigan	December 24, 2014	HB 4118 SB 275
Mississippi	March 24, 2014	HB 49
Missouri	July 12, 2011	HB 73
North Carolina	July 2013	HB 392
Oklahoma	November 1, 2012	HB 2388
Tennessee	2012	SB 2580
Utah	March 23, 2012	HB 155
West Virginia	March 23, 2016	SB 6
Wisconsin	2015	SB 21

While substance abuse issues have long been a part of conversations surrounding public assistance, the most recent push to implement testing procedures was a result of the federal reform of welfare in 1996. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 established rules that allow states to implement drug testing as part of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant (NCSL 2015).

However, the Personal Responsibility Act was not the first time federal lawmakers have focused on drug-related criminal activity when making evaluations about which families should be considered "worthy" of assistance (McCarty et al. 2012). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 was first time drug-related sanctions were added to federal assistance programs. Lawmakers at

the time were reacting to sharp increases in drug related crimes in the late 1980s and 1990s. This legislation also reflected the federal government's long-spanning "war on drugs." Indeed, during remarks delivered on June 17, 1971, President Richard Nixon declared that drug abuse was "America's public enemy number one." (Nixon 1971) Federal efforts to address drug abuse were further intensified during the Reagan administration in response to the crack epidemic that ravaged poor urban communities of color (McCarty et al. 2012). Over the years, federal efforts culminated in crime-related restrictions on the TANF block grant, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and federal housing programs (McCarty et al. 2012).

The nature of drug testing legislative proposals varies considerably across states. Some states introduced measures to test all welfare applicants while others only proposed to test those who are suspected of illegal substance abuse. States also vary in the programs for which drug-testing measures will be required. In some states, testing procedures are only proposed for TANF applicants. In other states, proposals attach testing requirements more broadly to Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other state and local programs (NCSL 2015) .

The different approaches to legislative proposals reflect political learning that occurred overtime. Most notably, state legislators frequently adhered to the legal precedent established in a Michigan court case. Michigan was the first state to implement a program that requires drug testing of welfare applicants and recipients (Sands 2011). In 1999, Republican Governor John Engler authorized a pilot program that required Michigan welfare applicants under 65 years old to submit to a drug test or forfeit their benefits. Those already receiving benefits would be subject to random drug testing. Those who tested positive would be required to seek treatment to

continue collecting benefits. Those who refused treatment would no longer be eligible to receive assistance (Meredith 1999).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) quickly filed a case on behalf of nine Michigan welfare recipients who would be denied assistance if they refused to submit to random drug testing or failed to comply with the substance abuse treatment plan (ACLU 2000) . In 2000, U.S. District Court Judge Victoria Roberts issued a preliminary injunction against the enforcement of the law. She explained that allowing drug testing would "set a dangerous precedent." (ACLU 2000) In 2003, in the case *Marchwinski v. Howard*, the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the law violated the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable searches. Since then, nearly every state has proposed legislation that would require drug testing as part of their eligibility criteria for public assistance (NCSL 2015). In most cases, state leaders adhere to the legal precedent established in *Marchwinski v. Howard* and avoid blanket-testing policies. However, differences in the nature of legislative proposals still remain. These differences reflect state legislators' different interpretations of the federal governments' stance on what constitutes "suspicion-based" drug testing (NCSL 2015).

As it relates to stereotype-consistent and inconsistent portrayals of the targets of policy measures, most Americans associate welfare with unmarried African American women who have given birth to multiple children and reside in urban areas (Gilens 2009). This association stems from the "welfare queen" political story introduced by President Ronald Reagan forty years ago on the campaign trail. According to Reagan, welfare recipients too often are big spenders who boast of lavish lifestyles that include driving Cadillacs at the expense of American taxpayers. What followed Reagan's characterization was the emergence of a story about social welfare that solidified a mental image of welfare recipients as female and African American. The

extant literature suggests this depiction continues to influence opinions about social welfare policy (Gilliam Jr 1999; Hancock 2004). Given the long-spanning history of the welfare queen stereotype in the United States, I consider political stories that describe welfare recipients as African American women to be invoking stereotype-consistent portrayals of the targets of social welfare policy proposals. I categorize political stories that diverge from this characterization as stereotype-inconsistent.

3.3.2 Legalization of Medical Marijuana

As of March 2016, twenty-five states and territories have passed legislation that implements medical marijuana and cannabis programs (NCSL 2016). These states and territories include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. Table 2 presents the year each state adopted drug testing measures and the inaugural legislation.

Table 2: Medical Marijuana Policies Enacted (by State)

State	Date Enacted	Legislation	State	Date Enacted	Legislation
Alaska	1998	Measure 8	**Minnesota**	2014	SF 2471
Arizona	2010	Prop 203	**Montana**	2004	Initiative 148
California	1996	Prop 215	**Nevada**	2000	Question 9
Colorado	2000	Amendment 20	**New Hampshire**	2013	HB 573
Connecticut	2012	HB 5387	**New Jersey**	2009	SB 119
Delaware	2011	SB 17	**New Mexico**	2007	SB 523
DC	1998	Initiative 59	**New York**	2014	A6357
Guam	2014	Proposal 14A	**Ohio**	2016	HB 523
Hawaii	2000	SB 862	**Oregon**	1998	Oregon Medical Marijuana Act
Illinois	2013	HB 1	**Pennsylvania**	2016	SB 3
Maine	1999	Question 2	**Rhode Island**	2007	SB 791
Maryland	2003	HB 702	**Vermont**	2004	SB 76
Massachusetts	2012	Question 3	**Washington**	1998	Initiative 692
Michigan	2008	Proposal 1			

Marijuana has a long history in the United States that traces back to the seventeenth century (Lee 2013). However, the most recent debates surrounding the medical use of marijuana date back to the 1970s. Robert Randall, an advocate for medical marijuana and the founder of Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics (ACT), kick-started the modern medical marijuana

movement. Randall's interest in medical marijuana developed after he was diagnosed with glaucoma as a teen. Doctors told him that he would go blind within a matter of years. Because of this diagnosis, Randall underwent numerous tests for alternative medical treatments to slow the decay of his eyesight. When no other alternatives seemed to work, Randall tried marijuana. Over time, he discovered that marijuana seemed to slow the decay of his eyesight. Randall used his experience to demand legal access to government marijuana. The federal government created the Compassionate Care Investigational New Drug (IND) program in 1978. The program allowed people with certain medical conditions to use marijuana as an alternative treatment. In 1981, Randall and his wife founded Alliance ACT. The mission of the organization was to legalize marijuana for medical use.

During the same period, the United States was experiencing the onset of the HIV epidemic. Men and woman who became infected with the disease often suffered a long and painful death (Shilts 2007). At the same time, stigma surrounding gay men, the group most affected by the disease in the early years, led to a slow response by the medical community, particularly the Center for Disease Control (CDC) (Shilts 2007). The CDC's slow response prompted patients to seek alternative treatments to improve their quality of life. Marijuana quickly became a tool for reducing the discomfort associated with the disease.

The rise in HIV and AIDS infections in the United States, together with the Randalls' fight, serve as the backdrop for contemporary debates surrounding the legalization of medical marijuana. The HIV/AIDS epidemic created an ever-growing constituency of patients who sought out the drug to relieve the agonizing pain associated with HIV and AIDS symptoms (Shilts 2007). From this vantage point, it is not surprising that California, a community that was an epicenter of the epidemic, was the first state to legalize medical marijuana. On November 15,

1996, Proposition 215, also known as the Compassionate Use Act, was approved by general election ballot. The law allowed the sale and medical use of marijuana among patients suffering with symptoms from HIV, AIDS, cancer and other chronic diseases.

Beyond California, state regulations vary considerably. Some states require a patient registry while others do not. In some cases, states allow medical marijuana growers to operate dispensaries while others only allow caregivers to grow on behalf of ailing patients. Still others simply allow individuals to use medical need as a legal defense in court. Similar to drug testing legislative proposals, the different approaches to legalizing medical marijuana reflects political learning that occurred overtime. In particular, many state legislators reacted to the chaotic trajectory faced by California state legislators. As the first state to implement medical marijuana, state lawmakers faced a steep learning curve. Lawmakers were keenly aware of the chaotic implementation of Proposition 215 in California. In fact, a distinct political argument theme emerged in my content analysis that taps state lawmakers' awareness of the outcome of legislative proposals in other states. This argument theme captures commentary about the importance of learning from the legislative challenges faced in states that have already approved medical marijuana when formulating new medical marijuana policy proposals. One of the most frequent concerns expressed in this commentary was a fear that medical marijuana dispensaries would proliferate on city corners like they did in the wake of Proposition 215.

Given the relationship between the HIV and AIDS patients and the earliest medical marijuana legislation, in the current analysis I consider political stories that describe medical marijuana patients as HIV patients as invoking stereotype-consistent portrayals of the targets of policy proposals. I categorize political stories that diverge from this characterization as stereotype-inconsistent.

3.3.3 Discussion of the Effect of Policy History on the Nature of Storytelling

Taken together, the political history of drug testing for public assistance and legalization of medical marijuana indicate that these policies exhibit differing levels of racialization. On the one hand, the origins drug testing proposals date back to federal efforts to mandate particular behaviors in cities being devastated by crime and addiction in the 1980s and 1990s. This history has cultivated a deep association between welfare policy and people of color in the United States. Indeed, previous scholarship suggests that for most Americans welfare discussions conjure images of poor African Americans who reside in urban areas (Gilens 2009). Legalization of medical marijuana is different. Contemporary efforts to legalize medical marijuana stem from a public health crisis that was not intensely racialized.

I expect that political storytelling in each of these policy areas will reflect these different trajectories. More specifically, I expect the range of drug testing story characters will reflect the experiences of a much smaller subset of the population: the poor. On the other hand, health concerns affect all members of society. Given this, I expect that medical marijuana stories will reflect a more diverse range of story characters and experiences.

3.5 Data and Methods

3.5.1 Methodological Approach and Rationale

To reconstruct the political arguments relating to drug testing for welfare benefits and the medical use of marijuana, I conducted a content analysis of coverage of these issues in nine national newspapers. I collected these news articles using the *ProQuest National Newspaper*

Database and *Lexis Nexus*. I focused on elite discourse owing to a long line of research that suggests mass media has exercised a growing influence in the electorate's perception of policy issues in recent decades. As noted earlier, Zaller finds that the positive and negative messages put forward by political actors in media coverage helps determine the considerations individuals employ when expressing their views on public policy measures. Given this finding, I include national newspapers, one of several viable vantage points for describing and analyzing political information presented to the electorate. I include nine of the highest circulation newspapers in the United States: *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *Denver Post*, *New York Daily News*, *New York Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*. By including the nine highest circulation newspapers in the United States that reflect seven distinct media companies (see Table 3), I feel confident that my study will provide a reasonably accurate portrait of elite discourse surrounding each policy issue.

However, there are potential limitations of this approach. A skeptical reader might argue another medium, such as television news, would provide a more accurate account of information consumed by the electorate. However, existing research suggests the content of news coverage differs based on the medium. For example, Chaffee and Frank (1996) find that print media focuses on the parties while television news emphasizes political candidates in its coverage. Previous research also suggests that there are selection effects of media outlet within the electorate. Those who are more interested in politics are more likely to prefer printed media or broadcast news which provide "hard news" than those less interested individuals who prefer the "soft news" presented in cable news outlets (Chaffee and Frank 1996; Prior 2005a). Still, it is important to acknowledge that most Americans consume news through television. Given this, the current study represents an initial exploration of the effect of political storytelling. In subsequent

iterations of this project, I plan to replicate this analysis on television news. Despite the narrow representation of elite discourse, I feel confident making the modest claim that my study captures an important, albeit distinctive, component of news coverage of my two policy issues.

Table 3: Newspapers Included in Analysis by Parent Media Company

Media Parent Company	**Newspaper Name**
Gannett Company	USA Today
Jeff Bezos Nash Holdings	Washington Post
MediaNewsGroup, Inc.	Denver Post
Mortimer Zuckerman	New York Daily News
NewsCorps	New York Post
	Wall Street Journal
New York Times Company	New York Times
The Tribune Company	Chicago Tribune
	Los Angeles Times

3.5.2 Content Analysis Coding Scheme

In both policy domains, I coded political arguments either in favor of, or in opposition to, the policy issue. For each of these political arguments, I coded whether the argument was a thematic political frame or political story. I coded general statements that offer considerations that should be taken into account when evaluating the policy issue as a thematic political frame. I coded statements that offer chronological accounts of individuals' or groups' experiences as political stories. I coded individual line segments of news stories as either a political frame or political story. I then coded the segment with the argument theme that was associated with this line segment. In the subsequent analysis, all descriptive statistics reflect the number of line segments that were associated with a particular argument theme.

Below I provide two examples of political stories and thematic political frames line segments that were coded in my analysis. I picked these examples randomly for illustrative purposes only.

Example 1: "Protection of Rights" Thematic Political Frame

> Drug testing not based on reasonable suspicion smacks of an unconstitutional search, the kind of government intrusion upon an individual's rights that conservatives ought to rail against. (Wickham 2011)

Example 2: "Protection of Rights" Political Story

> Tuesday's decision stemmed from a 2011 suit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida and the Florida Justice Institute on behalf of a Central Florida resident, Luis W. Lebron, a Navy veteran and full-time student who had filed for public assistance. Mr. Lebron, who provided care for his disabled mother and was raising a young child as a single father, argued that it was unfair to require drug testing when no suspicion of drug abuse existed. Judge Scriven agreed. Howard Simon, executive director of the A.C.L.U. of Florida, said that "the courts are now signaling to politicians that they are not going to treat poor people as if they were exempt from constitutional rights." (Robles 2014)

3.5.3 Data Collection

I analyzed coverage of drug testing for welfare benefits that appeared between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2014. This period begins two years before the passage of the first drug-testing legislation after the historic Michigan court decision. To identify relevant newspaper articles, I used the search terms "drug testing" and "welfare." My analysis resulted in 61 relevant news stories. The number of relevant news stories in each newspaper ranges from 2 to 17. Table 4 summarizes news stories by newspaper and year.

Table 4: Drug Testing for Welfare Benefits Newspaper Articles by Year, 2009-2014

Newspaper	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	Total
Chicago Tribune	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
Denver Post	0	0	0	7	1	0	8
Los Angeles Times	0	0	2	0	1	1	4
New York Daily Times	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
New York Post	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New York Times	0	0	6	3	6	2	17
USA Today	0	0	3	7	0	0	10
Wall Street Journal	0	0	0	1	1	2	4
Washington Post	0	0	0	6	7	0	13
TOTAL	**0**	**1**	**13**	**24**	**18**	**5**	**61**

Twenty-six political argument themes emerged in the analysis. These arguments reflect a wide range of legislative concerns. For example, arguments explored economic considerations such as the amount of investment of taxpayers' money required to monitor the program. I coded 276 drug testing thematic political frame line segments. I coded 120 drug testing political story line segments. Appendix A provides a brief description of each of political argument I identified and the number of line segments coded in each argument area.

Three political stories argument themes consistently appeared throughout the period of analysis: (1) Reality of Drug Use, (2) Protection of Rights, and (3) Stigmatizing the Poor. These stories accounted for 22.6, 23.7 and 10.8 percent of the total political story line segments coded in the drug testing for welfare benefits content analysis, respectively. During the same period,

thematic political frames associated with these arguments accounted for 9.5, 9.1 and 14.3 percent of the total thematic political frame line segments coded in the drug testing for welfare benefits content analysis.

I analyzed coverage of legalization of medical marijuana between January 1, 1994 and December 31, 2014. This period begins two years before the passage of the first medical marijuana legislation in California in 1996. To identify relevant newspaper articles, I used the search terms "medical marijuana" and "legalization." This search yielded 5,969 news articles. I generated a random sample of 33 percent of these articles. In total, I analyzed 1,983 articles. My analysis resulted in 921 relevant news stories. The number of relevant news articles in each newspaper ranges from 17 to 200. Table 3 summarizes news articles by newspaper and year.

Forty-four argument themes emerged in the legalization of medical marijuana analysis. Similar to drug testing legislative proposals, these arguments reflect a wide range of legislative concerns. For example, arguments explored the concerns that business owners face when attempting to open a medical dispensary such as the dangers they face running a primarily cash-based business because banks, fearing federal prosecution, refuse to furnish banking services. I coded a 2120 medical marijuana thematic political frame line segments. I coded 2373 medical marijuana political story line segments. Appendix B provides a brief description of these arguments and the number of line segments coded in each argument area.

I identified three political story argument themes that consistently appeared throughout the period of analysis: (1) Pain Relief, (2) Fear of Prosecution and (3) Federal Versus State Rights. These stories accounted for 12.7, 8.3 and 9.2 percent of the total political story segments coded in the legalization of medical marijuana content analysis, respectively. Along the same

lines, thematic political frames associated with these arguments accounted for 11.2, 6.6 and 11.4 percent of the total thematic political frame segments coded in the legalization of medical marijuana content analysis.

It is important to acknowledge the disparity in the volume of line segments coded in the two issue areas. This difference likely reflects the longer period of analysis in the medical marijuana issue area. It may also reflect the larger number of states that passed legislative proposals. Beyond these considerations, it may also be the case that this disparity reflects the differences in the level of racialization of these policy issues. In the next two sections, I provide a thick description of the six political stories themes I identified in my analysis.

3.6 Drug Testing for Welfare Benefits Political Storytelling

I identified three drug testing for welfare benefits political storytelling themes: (1) Reality of Drug Use, (2) Protection of Rights, and (3) Stigmatizing the Poor. These story themes are listed in the order in which they appeared in news coverage. The *Reality of Drug Use* story theme debates the prevalence of drug abuse among welfare recipients relative to the general population. The *Protection of Rights* theme interjects claims about the constitutionality of drug-testing measures. The *Stigmatizing the Poor* theme asserts that welfare recipients are mostly hard-working citizens who have fallen on hard times. Given this, drug-testing measures are both dehumanizing and mean spirited. In the following sections, I describe the stories associated with each of these themes, discuss the American political values that align with these disputes and the moral principles that are implicit in these disagreements.

3.6.1 *Reality of Drug Use* Political Story Theme

The *Reality of Drug Use* political story theme features arguments about the rates of drug use among welfare recipients relative to the general population. The story theme centers on both implicit and explicit claims about the moral virtues of welfare recipients. The explicit claims contend that welfare recipients abuse illegal drugs at a higher rate than the general population. For instance, during his 2010 gubernatorial campaign Rick Scott promised to keep drug abusers off of Florida welfare rolls (Wickham 2011). During a CNN interview Scott stated, "Studies show that people that are on welfare are higher users of (illegal) drugs than people not on welfare." (Wickham 2011)

Scott's depiction of welfare recipients as drug addicts puts those who receive assistance in tension with American political values regarding individualism. Individualism suggests virtuous citizens are independent, hardworking and self-reliant (Huntington 1981; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Drug addicts are the opposite. Beholden to the powerful pull of addiction, addicts are often unpredictable and underemployed (White 2014) . Thus, by tying the request for assistance to testing procedures, political leaders like Governor Scott were implicitly suggesting that individuals who turn to public assistance are more likely to be dependent members of society who unfairly look to others to support their lifestyles. Given this "reality", testing advocates argue that the government possesses the authority to put mechanisms in place to ensure that those who receive these benefits are living in a way that is consistent with the expectations of citizens. Drug testing is one of many possible ways to mandate a particular lifestyle.

The earliest *Reality of Drug Use* political storytelling challenges the premise of arguments interjected by Governor Scott and other supporters of drug-testing legislative proposals. In an article that appeared in *USA Today* on August 30, 2011 journalist DeWayne Wickham describes the "expected snag" that Rick Scott confronted in his campaign promise to keep drug abusers off of Florida welfare rolls: there were not a substantial number of drug abusers on Florida welfare rolls in the first place (Wickham 2011). Wickham explains that only two percent of Florida welfare recipients tested positive for illegal drugs, another two percent failed to complete the application process and 96 percent were found to be drug free. Despite these findings, Scott persisted in his support for drug testing. Wickham argues that drug testing is a "fishing expedition to find a reason to cut welfare rolls" and is motivated by "ideology" rather than "good sense." (Wickham 2011) Wickham uses the story of Governor Rick Scott and the state of Florida to illustrate his claim that lawmakers are supporting drug-testing proposals based on the faulty premise that individuals who request money from the state are more inclined than others to abuse drugs.

Subsequent stories similarly question the validity of lawmakers' assumptions about welfare recipients' drug use. The characters in each of these stories were state officials who passed drug-testing proposals only to uncover meager numbers of welfare applicants who tested positive for drug use. For instance, in an article that appeared in the *New York Times* on October 11, 2011 journalist A.G. Sulzberger details the monetary assistance that Florida welfare recipients receive and the rates at which they have been shown to abuse drugs. Readers learn that the average recipient receives $253 a month for less than five months. They also learn that since Florida's drug testing bill passed 7,030 applicants passed drug screenings, 32 failed and 1,597 refused to submit to testing. Sulzberger describes how lawmakers on each side of the debate

interpret these findings differently. Testing opponents argue the number of drug users among people who receive public benefits is actually *lower* than the general population. Testing supporters conclude that drug abusers were deterred from taking the test in the first place (Sulzberger 2011) .

Subsequent news coverage presented similar accounts of drug testing in Florida and four other states that implemented testing procedures only to uncover a meager number of welfare applicants who tested positive for drugs. For instance, in a column that appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* on September 2, 2013 journalist Rex Huppke referenced an *Associated Press* report that found that out of 466 welfare applicants who were drug tested in Utah only 12, or 2.5 percent, tested positive. Readers learn this figure falls "far below the national average for drug use." (Huppke 2013)

In my analysis, I identified 19 stories associated with this political argument theme. Lawmakers who supported drug testing sought to identify drug abuse among welfare recipients as a social problem that required legislative attention. In response to these claims, journalists and other interested stakeholders interjected stories from states that passed drug-testing measures and failed to uncover rampant drug abuse. Over the years, these stories suggested that no such problem existed and drug-testing proposals were pointless.

3.6.2 *Protection of Rights* Political Story Theme

The second political story theme that was present in news coverage features arguments about the constitutionality of drug-testing legislative proposals. The *Protection of Rights* story theme centers on claims that mandating drug-testing procedures for welfare recipients violate individuals' constitutional protection against unreasonable search and seizure. For instance, in a

column that appeared in *USA Today* on April 18th 2011 Jay Rorty, director of the ACLU's Criminal Law Reform Project is quoted as having said that "laws requiring passing a drug test as a condition of benefits could run afoul of the Constitution." (Barnett 2011) Thus, Protection of Rights political storytelling taps long-standing debates about restricting the scope of government and delineating the proper authority of government in the everyday lives of ordinary Americans.

The earliest story recounts the experience of lawmakers in Michigan who passed a law mandating testing for all welfare recipients. A federal court ruling struck down the state's law, declaring that it mandated unreasonable search and seizure (Sulzberger 2011). Subsequent *Protection of Rights* storytelling recounts the legal battle fought by the ACLU in Florida beginning in September 2011. ACLU lawyers argued that testing requirements constituted "an unreasonable search and seizure." (Sulzberger 2011) The main character featured in these stories was the ACLU's lead plaintiff in the case: Luis Lebron. Lebron first appeared in news coverage in the *Chicago Tribune* on October 25th 2011. Readers learn that Lebron is a 35-year-old University of Central Florida student who served in the Navy. Lebron applied for emergency cash assistance from the Florida Department of Children and Families to help support his 4-year-old son. In the story, readers are told that Lebron claims that he has never used drugs and believes "requiring him to be tested and to pay for that testing violates his civil rights." (World Briefing 2011) We learn that U.S. District Judge Mary Scriven, blocked Florida lawmakers from requiring Lebron to submit to a "suspicionless" drug test as a condition of receiving welfare benefits until the case is resolved. The story concludes with Lebron's statement that "this is a great thing for Floridians." (World Briefing 2011)

Subsequent stories dig deeper into the details of the ACLU's challenge to Florida's drug-testing law signed by Governor Rick Scott in May 2011. In an editorial that appeared in the *New*

York Times on November 1, 2011, the author argues that lawmakers are "gratuitously inflicting punitive measures on people who seek government help." (Punishing Poverty 2011) In developing their argument that drug-testing measures are punitive, the authors recount the details of the Florida law. As part of the discussion, the author details Judge Mary Scriven's ruling that Florida demonstrated "no special need for an exception to the Fourth Amendment that would allow drug testing of all aid applicants without any basis for suspicion." (Punishing Poverty 2011) The author uses this case to support the broader claim that "being poor and needing public assistance is not a crime." (Punishing Poverty 2011) In a column that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on February 27, 2013 journalist Joe Palazzolo recounts the story of Florida to suggest that similar laws passed by Republican-controlled legislatures will likely be called into question (Palazzolo 2013).

In total, I identified 21 *Protection of Rights* political stories. Over several years, these storylines converged on the circumstances faced by one man: Luis Lebron. The ACLU called on Lebron, a father, student and former Navy man, to advance their argument that politicians cannot "treat poor people as if they [are] exempt from constitutional rights." (Robles 2014) Political elites used these stories to question the government's authority to mandate that welfare recipients submit to drug-testing procedures.

3.6.3 *Stigmatizing the Poor* Political Story Theme

The final political story theme that was present in drug testing news coverage features arguments about drug testing unfairly stigmatizing welfare applicants. The *Stigmatizing the Poor* political story centers on claims that drug-testing measures are "about smearing people who are getting welfare." (Associated Press 2011) For instance, Kimberly Davis, the director of social

services for a program called Operation Breakthrough, is quoted as saying that drug-testing legislation "perpetuates the stereotype that low-income people are lazy, shiftless drug addicts (who) if they pick(ed) themselves up from the bootstraps then the country wouldn't be in the mess it's in." (Sulzberger 2011)

In many ways, *Stigmatizing the Poor* political storytelling reflects the American inegalitarian ascriptive tradition described by Smith (1999). The essential claim of this story is that drug-testing measures make implicit claims about the character of low-income and poor people who apply for public assistance. These measures assume that because individuals need assistance, they are failing to live up to the demands of moral citizens. As such, the government possesses the authority to intercede and institute measures to ensure government resources are not abused by less virtuous citizens.

The earliest *Stigmatizing the Poor* story recounts the experience of 22-year-old Kansas City resident Nicole, who benefited from social services offered from the Operation Breakthrough program. In a column that appeared in the *New York Times* we learn that Nicole is a student and mother of three children who struggles to support her children on a monthly welfare check of $342 plus $642 in food stamps. Earlier that day, Nicole's electricity was cut off. She also faced eviction from her subsidized housing. She told journalist A.G. Sulzberger that given everything she had going on "the idea of taking drugs seemed ridiculous." (Sulzberger 2011)

Sulzberger uses Nicole's example to illustrate Operation Breakthrough director Kimberley Davis' claim that drug-testing measures wrongly perpetuate stereotypes of low-income people. Far from being a degenerate, Nicole is a mother who is trying to better herself by

getting an education. She simply needs a bit of assistance. Proponents of drug testing countered that "drug testing identifies people using drugs and provides an avenue for intervention." (Sulzberger 2011) However, they failed to interject stories in support of this argument.

Instead, *Stigmatizing the Poor* stories recount the experiences of welfare recipients being fingerprinted by the Bloomberg administration in New York City (Punishing Poverty 2011). Another political story details the drug bust of Florida Republican Trey Radel who voted in favor of drug testing food stamp recipients and was later arrested for buying cocaine from a federal agent. Columnist Dvorak (2013) argues that testing advocates unfairly turn a blind eye to Representative Radel, who uses cocaine and collects a government paycheck while forcing "a single mom who needs help buying milk for her kids" to submit to drug testing "before she gets one government dime." Drug-testing opponents use these types of stories to illustrate their argument that drug-testing measures are "an attack on poor people." (Hoover 2012)

I identified nine *Stigmatizing the Poor* political stories in my analysis. Interestingly, there seems to be a common thread that connects *Reality of Drug Use* and *Stigmatizing the Poor* political storytelling. Both story themes push back against assumptions that poor people are somehow more inclined to engage in deviant activities than the general population. However, the *Reality of Drug Use* political stories couple accounts of lawmakers in states that passed legislation with statistical evidence that undermines arguments that welfare recipients are more inclined to abuse drugs. On the other hand, *Stigmatizing the Poor* political storytelling does not invoke hard evidence. Instead, these stories invoke anecdotal experiences that illustrate that drug-testing legislative proposals are premised on faulty stereotypes of poor people in America. Different from drug-testing supporters, these storytellers suggest drug testing proposals

"demonize the unemployed, most of whom have no job for no fault of their own" particularly within the context of the recent economic recession (Simon 2011).

3.7 Legalization of Medical Marijuana Political Storytelling

I identified three legalization of medical marijuana political storytelling themes: (1) Pain Relief, (2) Fear of Prosecution and (3) Federal versus State Rights. These stories are listed in the order they emerged in news coverage. The *Pain Relief* story theme interjects claims about the potential for medical marijuana to alleviate pain associated with medical diagnoses. The *Fear of Prosecution* story describes medical marijuana patients' and medical doctors' fear of being arrested for using (or prescribing) medical marijuana. The *Federal versus State Rights* theme recounts the disparity between state and federal laws regarding the medical use of marijuana. In the following subsections, I describe the stories associated with each of these themes and discuss the American political values that align with these disputes and the moral principles that are implicit in these disagreements.

3.7.1 *Pain Relief* Political Story Theme

The *Pain Relief* political story theme features arguments about the potential for medical marijuana to alleviate pain associated with medical diagnoses. These stories recount the experiences of patients with chronic medical diagnosis that often involve painful symptoms or treatment methods. The central claim of *Pain Relief* political stories is that state lawmakers have a moral responsibility to provide access to treatment options that minimize the suffering of patients living with chronic diseases.

In each of the stories, we learn about the daily battle of medical patients as they face their day-to-day medical reality. The characters in these stories are individuals suffering with chronic diseases, the family and friends of patients who care for these patients and local activists. Medical patients are children, young adults and the elderly. They are men and women, single and married, army veterans and civilians. These patients are afflicted with a range of diseases including AIDS, cancer, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, post-traumatic stress syndrome and back pain.

Political elites who support the legalization of medical marijuana primarily interjected *Pain Relief* political stories to illustrate their claims that marijuana is effective in relieving pain and should be legalized by state legislatures. Often the stories are coupled with statements about how "someday, you may need it" or "God forbid someone you love may need it." (Goldberg 1996) In these stories, readers learn about patients forced to break the law to obtain marijuana to treat their symptoms. The first *Pain Relief* political story chronicled the experience of Anna Boyce, a 67-year-old Orange County nurse whose husband battled lung cancer. Anna shares that the California proposition to legalize medical marijuana was her "gift" to her husband who died the previous year (Bailey 1996c). Her husband John was 70-years-old and a "very upright, law-abiding man." (Goodavage 1996) Marijuana was the one medication that eased John's intense pain; but the couple had to break the law to get it. None of John's doctors would prescribe marijuana even though they were willing to write a prescription for morphine and other drugs whose effects were far more powerful than marijuana (Bailey 1996c). According to Anna, marijuana gave the couple "several more precious months together." (Goodavage 1996) Smoking a few puffs after each round of chemotherapy helped John keep his weight up and improved his

mood (Bailey 1996a) . Since John's death, Anna has been traveling to nursing home and senior clubs to convince other elderly individuals that marijuana is "good medicine." (Goodavage 1996)

Legalization advocates in California also shared another *Pain Relief* story that documents the experience of 77-year-old Hazel Rodgers, who loves to garden, make collages for her grandchildren, and cuddle with her cat. Different from other grandmothers, however, Hazel takes two puffs of marijuana from a small pipe daily to ease her glaucoma and arthritic pain (Goodavage 1996). Legalization advocates argue that passing legislation that permits the medical use of marijuana will allow patients like John and Hazel to use marijuana without becoming criminals. In all, I identified 334 *Pain Relief* political stories that appeared in news coverage between 1994 and 2014. Each of these stories resembles that of Anna, John and Hazel.

3.7.2 *Fear of Prosecution* Political Story Theme

The second political story theme that was present in legalization of medical marijuana news coverage chronicles medical marijuana patients' and medical doctors' fear of being arrested for using (or prescribing) medical marijuana. The central claim of the *Fear of Prosecution* political story is that state legislative proposals did little to resolve the legal predicament surrounding the medical use of marijuana and protection of medical marijuana patients and doctors. According to these stories, patients and doctors remain vulnerable because of the tension between state laws that permit the medical use of marijuana and federal laws that classify marijuana as a Schedule II drug that has no medicinal value. As a result, medical marijuana patients and doctors are in constant fear of federal drug officials cracking down and pursuing criminal cases.

Fear of Prosecution political story illustrate the anxieties that medical patients face when they use medical marijuana. The earliest stories feature doctors who refuse to prescribe medical marijuana because they fear prosecution. In a column that appeared in the *Washington Post* on January 1, 1997, journalist William Claiborne documents the perspectives of several doctors who fear legal and professional consequences if they prescribe medical marijuana. Richard Cohen, a San Francisco oncologist who actively supported California's Proposition 215 explains, "There's no way I can recommend [medical marijuana] now without risking livelihood. It's a threat to my license to write prescriptions, and if I can't write prescriptions, I'm out of business." (Claiborne 1997)

Readers also learn about the experiences of Victor Beer, who treats 600 HIV-positive and AIDS patients at his clinic. According to Doctor Beer, only one patient, Joshua Fisher, asked him for a medical marijuana recommendation. He refused because he considered it imprudent to jeopardize his license and practice. Joshua Fisher is Doctor Beer's patient. Readers learn that Joshua has been suffering for twelve years from AIDS complications including nausea. Medical marijuana controls his vomiting. He also suffers from life threatening seizures. Despite Joshua's suffering, Beer says the mixed messages sent by the Los Angeles County District Attorney suggests that "the present administration is going to take serious action against recommending marijuana despite [California's] new state law." (Claiborne 1997)

Dr. Beer's fears about losing his license echo concerns expressed by the California Medical Association two months before. In a column that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on November 7, 1996 journalist Eric Bailey described a meeting of California's police chiefs, sheriffs and county prosecutors after voters approved

Proposition 215. According to Bailey, officials at the medical association voiced their "deep concern that federal drug officials might crack down on physicians who recommend pot to patients." (Bailey 1996b)

Subsequent stories continue to describe the legal gray area created by Proposition 215 in California and the uncertainty it creates for medical marijuana patients. While the earliest stories describe patients' anxieties about the potential for arrest, later *Fear of Prosecution* stories recount the experiences of patients who were arrested and now face legal charges. For instance, Journalist Maya Hanson (1997) reports the experience of Todd McCormick, who started a medical marijuana grow business and supplied the plant to buyer's clubs across California. He was arrested for cultivating more than 4,000 marijuana plants in a home he rented in Bel-Air, an affluent neighborhood in Los Angeles, California.

Todd also uses the drug to control his epilepsy. He takes prescription medication for the disease; however, these medications do not control the sensations that forewarn impending seizures. He sometimes smokes marijuana to reduce the intensity of the migraines and floating sensations caused by his epilepsy. Readers learn that when Proposition 215 passed, Todd hoped that he "could get occasional relief from my own backyard without fear of prosecution… [that] I wouldn't be subsidizing gangs and drug cartels…and could throw a few seeds in the sunshine and remove myself from the drug economy." (Hanson 1997) He concluded, "I was wrong." (Hanson 1997) Instead, buyer's clubs popped up selling the plant at rates street dealers charged.

Hanson uses Todd McCormick's example to argue that Proposition 215 did little to resolve the precarious position of patients who rely on marijuana for relief from pain associated with their medical diagnosis. Rather than providing recourse for these patients to grow the plant in their backyard, she argues the poorly defined law created an opening for a new pot economy to sprout up that simply replicates the vulnerabilities imposed by the previous system on medical patients. Instead of Republicans and Democrats seizing on the opportunity to "relegate marijuana to the garden where no gangs with guns, activists or entrepreneurs were waiting to take their cuts", she argues the poorly defined law leaves medical marijuana patients who grow the plant for personal use vulnerable to asset forfeiture (Hanson 1997). As a result, they must rely on people like Todd McCormick who "take the risks for them." (Hanson 1997)

In all, I identified 259 *Fear of Prosecution* political stories that appeared in news coverage between 1994 and 2014. The focus and details emphasized in these stories changed over the period of analysis as the political context changed. For example, by the last year included in the analysis, several states passed legislation legalizing medical marijuana. These changes meant a shift in the characters featured in these stories. What began with accounts of individual patients' and doctors' fear of prosecution evolved into stories about the anxieties of marijuana growers, banks that provided financial backing to medical marijuana related businesses and dispensary owners who faced audits by the Internal Revenue Service or federal drug trafficking charges. The situations faced by these groups evolved over time as well. For instance, the earliest accounts described experiences buying and selling medical marijuana whereas later stories detailed the outcomes of medical marijuana patients applying for federal rent subsidies, traveling

through airport security, being pulled over by police in routine traffic stops and organizing to grow marijuana plant in neighborhood collectives.

3.7.3 *Federal versus State Rights* Political Story Theme

The final political story theme details the standoff between state and federal officials regarding state legislative proposals to legalize the medical use of marijuana. The *Federal versus State Rights* political story relates federal officials' efforts to enforce federal drug laws. For instance, one story featured Orange County Sheriff Brad Gates, who volunteered to provide the name of any doctor involved with marijuana to federal drug agents in the aftermath of the passage of Proposition 215. Journalist Eric Bailey (1996d) uses Gates' story to highlight the uncertainty surrounding the federal government's position regarding state medical marijuana legislation. He explains that federal officials such as drug czar Barry McCaffrey have "talked tough" but have not yet offered concrete plans to respond to new medical marijuana laws passed in California and Arizona (Bailey 1996d). Instead, United States Attorney General Janet Reno is "in a process of reviewing the initiatives and options that are out there." (Bailey 1996d)

By the beginning of the following year, readers learn that federal officials now plan to "send letters to doctors, contractors and others warning that recommending marijuana as medicine is still a violation of federal antidrug laws." (Claiborne 1997) The federal government's position is that "the new laws threaten efforts to combat drug abuse." (Claiborne 1997) Rod Dunaway, a 38-year-old heavy equipment operator from Mission Viejo who uses medical marijuana to treat his glaucoma, was the recipient of one of these letters. Dunaway began using

marijuana to ease his pain in 1980 after a friend shared his positive experience using marijuana to treat his glaucoma. Medical marijuana provided instant relief.

For 15 years, Dunaway has taken three or four puffs from a small pipe before bed. For Rod, the marijuana reduced the pain around his eyes. The effect lasted throughout the next day, though it never left him feeling giddy or euphoric. According to Dunaway, he always did his job effectively. However, in 1995 the Orange County government started randomly drug testing employees whose jobs could affect public safety to comply with a 1991 federal law. His first drug screen produced a positive result. He was suspended for 30 days without pay. He was also put on probation for one year.

During this probation, Dunaway was required to submit to testing once every two months. The county told him he would lose his job if he tested positive again. For a year, he avoided using marijuana and fought his pain with conventional drugs. When Proposition 215 passed, he assumed he was protected from dismissal. Unfortunately, that was not the case. When he tested positive for a second time, the Orange County government initiated the process to dismiss him. Journalist Michael Janofsky (1997) uses Dunaway's story to illustrate his argument that there is a clash between state initiatives aimed at "benefiting people who have exhausted other means of seeking pain relief" and federal regulations "intended to protect public safety." (1997)

Other stories describe state officials' attempts to respond to the conflict created by state medical marijuana legislation. Journalist Tom Curley describes Ohio state officials' attempt to repeal a measure that recognized the medical use of marijuana as a defense against drug possession. According to Curley, the measure was "passed with little notice in 1995 as part of a

criminal code overhaul." (Curley 1996) Indeed, he explains that Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery says "no one has tested the law and if it conflicts with other state and federal drug laws." (Curley 1996) Curley uses the Ohio example to illustrate medical marijuana supporters' claims that state medical marijuana referendums may prompt backlash by state lawmakers.

Subsequent stories focus on the back and forth between federal officials who carried out drug raids and state leaders who expressed feeling "deeply troubled" by Justice Department lawsuits and federal officials' lack of respect for local governments' experience and expertise in developing community-based solutions to public health problems." (Claiborne 1998) For instance, San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown wrote commentary in the *Los Angeles Times* in which he declared,

> The current system isn't perfect. But until marijuana is approved by the Federal Drug Administration as a prescription drug, California's medical marijuana dispensaries are a viable medical alternative…Rather than censur[ing] the [HIV] public health crisis with a lawsuit, the Justice Department should urge the Clinton administration to work with local and state governments to implement a plan for distributing medical marijuana that complies with both federal and state law and that puts the needs of patients first (Brown 1998).

In Mayor Brown's comments, he calls on federal officials to work *with* him, not *past* him. Rather than debating whether state laws supersede federal laws, he urges the Clinton administration to put the needs of patients first. In this respect, Mayor Brown and other *Federal versus State Rights* political stories tap long-standing debates about the ideal relationship between local and national government. In total, I identified 243 *Federal versus State Rights* political stories between 1994 and 2014. These stories emulate lines of argumentation described in this section in a variety of states that considered (and passed) medical marijuana legislation.

3.8 Discussion

Given the background of my two policy issues, I expected that there would be vast differences in the nature of political storytelling in each issue area. Recall that I expected that drug testing political stories would center on the experiences of a relatively small subset of the population: the poor. On the other hand, I anticipated that medical marijuana political stories would reflect a more diverse range of story characters. I argued this would be the case because health matters affect all members of society.

The attributes of drug testing story characters were more extensive than I initially expected. Given the political history of drug testing initiatives, I expected to see women, children, underemployed individuals, drug addicts and felons featured in these stories. However, I did not anticipate that elected officials, men, a married couple, medical patients and veterans. The latter group of story characters is stereotype-inconsistent. Given my theoretical account of the effect of unexpected information on beliefs and behavior, I suspect that drug testing stories that featured these characters had a more pronounced effect on individuals' beliefs, behavior and information processing than stories that featured stereotype-consistent portrayals of the targets of drug testing proposals. Table 5 summarizes the attributes of drug testing story characters.

Table 5: Drug Testing for Welfare Benefits Story Character Attributes, 2009-2014

Individual Character Attributes	
Adult	7
Child	1
Drug Addict	2
Elected Official	5
Felon	1
Man	7
Married Couple	1
Parent	9
Patient	3
Student	3
Thief	1
Underemployed	5
Undocumented Individual	1
Veteran	2
Woman	7
Young Adult	2
Patient Diagnosis	
Cancer	1
Depression	1
Lupus	1
Underemployed Occupation	
Butcher	1
Cashier	1
Janitor	1
Mechanic	1
Waitress	1

Interestingly, the nature of political storytelling in this area did not explicitly reflect the racialized history of welfare in the United States. In my content analysis coding procedure, I planned to code references to story characters' race. To my surprise, however, there were no direct references to race in the news article I read. Rather, these articles simply referred to "welfare applicants" in the text. Upon reflection, it is not all surprising that reporters failed to mention race explicitly. Given the long-standing "welfare queen" stereotype, reporters did not

need to explicitly activate this mental image for readers. Indeed, it was likely the case that this characterization was already at the top of individuals' minds when they read the title of the news article.

The drug testing political stories I identified in my analysis seem to reflect the constraints of this "collective understanding." Both the *Reality of Drug Use* and *Stigmatizing the Poor* political stories reflect long-standing depictions of welfare recipients as morally challenged members of society who require interventions to motivate them to become productive members of society. Implicit in both these stories are presumptions of moral deviance. In the *Reality of Drug* political story, testing advocates continually invoke the unsubstantiated claim that welfare recipients are more likely to abuse drugs than the general population. Interestingly, even when empirical evidence emerges that counters this assumption, testing supporters formulate counter interpretations that rationalize their understanding of moral deviance among those who apply for public assistance. The *Stigmatizing the Poor* political story likely emerged in an attempt to undermine the prevailing assumptions of deviance among welfare recipients.

Interestingly, the political story that moves beyond debating the behavioral tendencies of welfare recipients centers on a character who is quite clearly contrary to prevailing stereotypes of those who apply for public assistance. First, he is a man. Second, he is the sole caretaker for his son. Third, he is pursuing a college degree. Finally, he is a former member of the military. Each of these attributes turn mental images of welfare recipients on their head. From this perspective, the choice of characters might be considered political. The next two chapters demonstrate the power of these choices on how individuals process political information and form their policy opinions.

The course of storytelling related to the legalization of medical marijuana is entirely different. First, these stories feature a wide range of characters. Stories describe the experiences of children, mothers, fathers, doctors, lawmakers, elderly couples, men and woman who affected by an even wider range of medical diagnoses. Table 6 summarizes the attributes of legalization of medical marijuana story characters.

Table 6: Legalization of Medical Marijuana Story Character Attributes, 1996-2014

Individual Character Attributes	
Activist	38
Adult	210
Business Owner	173
Child	31
Doctor	22
Elected Official	2
Law Enforcement	7
Legislator	28
Parents	56
Patient	311
Researcher	16
Senior Citizen	41
Teenager	7
Veteran	25
Young Adult	19
Patient Diagnosis	
AIDS	32
Back Pain	20
Cancer	82
Dravet Syndrome	3
Epilepsy	20
Fibromylagia	3
Glaucoma	8
HIV	1
Multiple Sclerosis	22
PTSD	8

As it relates to mass opinion, the vast array of medical marijuana story characters may suggest that it may be easier for storytelling to influence beliefs and behavior in this issue area. Given the diversity of attributes of medical marijuana patients, it is likely easier for individuals to see themselves in the same shoes as story characters. Moreover, even if they are not themselves afflicted with these medical issues, they may have a close friend, significant other or family member who has battled these diseases. These experiences will likely make it fairly easy for individuals to empathize with medical patients who demand that marijuana be legalized for medical use. I dig deeper into expectations in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: A PRELIMINARY TEST OF THE EFFECT OF POLITICAL STORIES ON POLITICAL BELIEFS

4.1 Overview

In the previous chapters I argued that political stories that present positive, stereotype-inconsistent depictions of the targets of policy proposals should lead individuals who are predisposed to oppose a policy issue to feel more mentally involved with the storyline, perceive greater relevance of the subject matter to their lives and express empathy toward the targets of policy proposals. These affective responses, I hypothesized, should also influence subsequent policy attitudes and behavior.

In this chapter I present the findings of my initial anecdotal test of the effect of political storytelling on political beliefs and behavior. More specifically, I discuss observations I gleaned from a series of focus group meetings that invited individuals to share their reactions to the three drug testing for welfare benefit stories I identified in the content analysis. I used the meetings to answer two specific questions. First, what aspects of political stories seem to capture individuals' attention and influence how they process this information? Second, how do participants react to stereotype-consistent and stereotype-inconsistent portrayals of the targets of drug testing for welfare benefits policy proposals presented in political stories?

My observations of focus group participants suggest it is the combination of the narrative format and clearly defined moral justifications that may influence how individuals process information presented in political stories. In cases where the motivation behind policy proposals was vague or unclear in stories, participants counterargued against these arguments and filled in gaps with their own personal experiences. However, when there were clearly defined moral

justifications that tapped long-standing American political values, individuals engaged more carefully with the arguments presented in political stories. The political story featuring a stereotype-consistent portrayal of the targets of policy proposals led to mixed reactions. Some participants expressed emotional reactions to the storyteller while others reacted to the story characters. However, when presented with a political story that featured a stereotype-inconsistent portrayal of the targets of policy proposals that was positive participants reacted differently. This story seemed to provoke emotional reactions to the story character that, in turn, led to more positive assessments of welfare recipients.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I discuss my rationale for the use of the focus group method. Second, I describe the participants in each focus group meeting. Third, I describe the focus group meeting procedures. I present information about focus group participants' views on drug testing proposals prior to the focus group discussion and after reading the stimulus. Finally, I present my observations about the aspects of political stories that captured participants' attention and their reactions to stereotypes featured in these stories.

4.2 A Rationale for the Use of the Focus Group Method

I adopt the focus group method in the current analysis to discover how individuals make meaning of political stories and integrate this information into their understanding of policy issues. A major benefit of this method is that it allows researchers to observe how and why individuals process information (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007). These observations allow researchers to better speak to the rationale behind individuals' thinking. These benefits are particularly useful within the current project because they provide some context to patterns I may

observe in other aspects of the research design. Indeed, this method allows me to glean answers to "how" and "why" questions that may emerge in other aspects of the research design.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to make probabilistic generalizations about the effect of political stories on beliefs and behavior using the focus group method. However, following Vicsek (2010) it is possible to produce "tentative incidence generalisations." (2010, 125) To the extent that similar views are expressed across focus groups despite differences in their demographic composition, I can feel more confident that the patterns I observe may tap some common underlying relationship (Vicsek 2010). Within the context of the current study, these types of generalizations are particularly useful in providing anecdotal illustrations of how individuals react to the description of the targets of policy proposals in drug testing political stories. For instance, if there are common reactions to political stories that feature stereotype-inconsistent depictions of the targets of policy proposals, I can feel more confident that these descriptions may be of actual consequence in my theoretical account of political storytelling.

The focus group method also allows me to generalize about the existence of a certain response. Identifying "existence generalizations" can be particularly useful when seeking to illustrate the "processes, reasons and mechanisms [that] may explain a phenomenon." (Vicsek 2010, 126) In the current study, the mere existence of particular viewpoints was instructive for the analysis. For instance, in one of my group meetings, a participant pointed out a subtle difference in the agency given to characters in the two political stories she read. One political story contained a direct quote from the story character. This story was a firsthand account. The other story contained a quote from someone who reported what they observed of the story character. This story was a secondhand account. This difference, the participant interjected, was "entirely different reporting." Upon reflection, this participant was reminding me of the

importance of attending to the typology of political stories that might emerge in the analysis. Her comments also demonstrated that the choice of story type conveys different messages about the intent of storytellers.

When employing the focus group method it is especially important to be attentive to both group dynamics and moderator effects. Group discussions are often vulnerable to conformity issues that can systematically alter what a researcher observes in the meeting space. To address these issues, I briefly spoke with participants before the meeting to collect basic information about their background. These conversations also helped me identify reserved and boisterous participants. I used this information to vary the composition of each group. I was ultimately constrained by participants' schedules; however, I made a concerted effort to create heterogeneous groups that would be less likely to devolve into groupthink.

One limitation of my final sample was the over-representation of a few demographic characteristics. More specifically, Democrats were over-represented in the meetings. It was fortunate for my study that this group is predisposed to oppose drug-testing measures, since I was able to observe the behaviors of those from "the other side." Still, a greater representation of Republicans would have yielded richer information about how political stories are perceived by the electorate. Women were also over-represented in the meetings. I do not have strong theoretical priors about differences between men and women on drug testing for welfare benefits; however, I believe the conversations may have been enhanced by a stronger presence of men—particularly in the first focus group meeting.

Finally, the existing literature suggests focus group moderators often exert an unspoken influence in focus group meetings (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007; Vicsek 2010). Given

the topic of the meeting and prevailing stereotypes about welfare recipients, my identity as a young African American woman likely conveyed messages about what were "desirable" responses in the focus group meetings. Even if only on an implicit level, participants probably assumed I was a liberal-leaning Democrat who was opposed to drug testing proposals.

At each stage of hosting the focus group meetings I was proactive about minimizing the harmful effects of these assumptions on my research outcomes. First, I created a number system for all focus group materials that I collected including written feedback about drug testing proposals. My hope was that using numbers rather than names would depersonalize the process of sharing one's opinion. Second, in the pre-discussion meeting, I discussed the wide range of opinions that exist about drug policy proposals. I explained that there was no "right" answer for any of the questions posed to the group. Rather, I was simply interested in each person's opinion. Third, I provided notepads that participants could use to write down comments they did not want to share aloud or with the larger group. Finally, I began the discussion with an ice breaker activity that helped the group become more comfortable with one another. I believe each of these choices made participants more willing to share their ideas, however controversial. Indeed, there were several points in my meetings that I was surprised (but happy) that participants were willing to share an unpopular viewpoint with the group.

4.3 Focus Group Recruitment

I recruited 21 Vanderbilt employees to participate in one of three focus group meetings that took place in July and August 2015. My approach to recruiting focus group participants was threefold. First, I posted recruitment flyers across campus that invited Vanderbilt employees "to

participate in a research study taking place on campus this summer." The flyer explained that any Vanderbilt employee who is at least 18 years of age and identifies as either a Republican, Democrat, or Independent—irrespective of prior knowledge or interest levels—is welcome to participate. I also included a brief overview of what participants should expect in the meeting. The flyer explained that participants would meet on campus for a 90-minute focus group meeting with 6-8 other individuals. Before and after the meeting, they would be asked to fill out a questionnaire. During the meeting, they would be asked to "share your opinions about public policy and government." The flyer also explained that each participant would receive a $40 Visa cash card at the conclusion of the 90-minute meeting. Both an email address and a local Tennessee phone number were provided as a means to express interest in participating in the study. I also created a smaller version of the flyer that I handed out when walking around campus. Finally, I wrote an email to contacts I had in offices across campus that included the same details. I asked these contacts to forward the email to individuals they thought might be interested.

When participants expressed interest in the study, I asked a series of questions about their demographic characteristics including their gender, age, educational background, partisan affiliation and interest in politics. I extended an invitation to participate to 24 individuals. Three individuals were no shows the day of the meeting. I created fictional names for each participant in an effort to protect their identity. I use these fictionalized names throughout this chapter.

4.4 Focus Group Meeting Details

Recall from the last chapter that three drug testing political stories emerged in media coverage of legislative proposals between 2009 and 2014. The *Reality of Drug Use* political story theme features arguments about the rates of drug use among welfare recipients relative to the general population. The *Protection of Rights* political story theme explores claims that drug testing legislative proposals infringe on individuals' constitutional rights. The *Stigmatizing the Poor* political story theme features claims that drug-testing measures unfairly stigmatize individuals who apply for public assistance. Each focus group meeting focused on one of the aforementioned drug testing for welfare benefits political story themes.

4.4.1 *Reality of Drug Use* Focus Group Participants

The *Reality of Drug Use* focus group meeting took place on July 30, 2015. The group was composed of five women and one man. Four individuals identified as White and two African American. Eighty-three percent of participants in this group were college graduates. Sixty-seven percent of participants expressed either being interested or very interested in politics. Sixty-seven percent of participants identified as Democrats. The remaining individuals identified as a Republican and an Independent who leans Republican. Table 7 summarizes demographic information for each of the participants.

Table 7: Background Information for Reality of Drug Use Meeting Participants

Name	Race	Age Group	Educational Attainment	Political Interest	Ideological Identification	Partisan Identification
Barbara	Black	55 or older	Some College	Very Interested	Extremely Liberal	Democrat
Elizabeth	White	31-39	College Graduate	Interested	Liberal	Democrat
Linda	Black	50-54	College Graduate	Very Interested	Liberal	Democrat
James	White	26-30	College Graduate	Interested	Moderate	Independent (Republican leaning)
Susan	White	26-30	College Graduate	Somewhat Interested	Liberal	Democrat
Patricia	White	18-25	College Graduate	Somewhat Interested	Extremely Conservative	Republican

4.4.2 *Protection of Rights* Focus Group Participants

The *Protection of Rights* focus group meeting took place on August 3, 2015. The group was composed of five women and two men. Five individuals identified as White, one African American and one Hispanic. Most participants in this group were highly educated. Indeed, 57 percent of participants held advanced degrees. Fifty-seven participants were very interested in politics. As it relates to ideological disposition, 71 percent of participants self-identified as some degree of liberal; the remaining participants reported being moderate and slightly conservative. Participants were mixed in the strength of their partisan affiliation. Seventy-one percent of participants identified as Democrats. The remaining participants identified as a Republican and an Independent who leans Democrat. Table 8 summarizes demographic information for each of the participants.

Table 8: Background Information for Protection of Rights Meeting Participants

Name	Race	Age Group	Educational Attainment	Political Interest	Ideological Identification	Partisan Identification
Betty	Black	55 or older	College Graduate	Very Interested	Liberal	Democrat
Daniel	White	55 or older	Vocational School	Somewhat Interested	Slightly Conservative	Republican
Carol	White	26-30	Master's Degree	Somewhat Interested	Liberal	Democrat
Anthony	Hispanic	31-39	Master's Degree	Somewhat Interested	Slightly Liberal	Democrat
Lisa	White	18-25	College Graduate	Very Interested	Moderate	Independent (Democrat leaning)
Donna	White	50-54	Doctorate	Very Interested	Extremely Liberal	Democrat
Sharon	White	26-30	Master's Degree	Very Interested	Liberal	Democrat

4.4.3 *Stigmatizing the Poor* Focus Group Participants

The *Stigmatizing the Poor* focus group meeting took place on August 6, 2015. The group was composed of five women and three men. Six participants identified as White, one African American and one Hispanic. Similar to the previous group, most participants in the meeting were highly educated. Fifty percent of participants held advanced degrees. Sixty-two percent of individuals reported being very interested in politics. The remaining participants said they were somewhat interested in politics (one individual) or interested in politics (two individuals). Thirty-eight percent of participants identified as Democrat. Twenty-five percent identified as Republican. The remaining individuals identified as Independents. Table 9 summarizes demographic information for each of the participants.

Table 9: Background Information for Stigmatizing the Poor Meeting Participants

Name	Race	Age Group	Educational Attainment	Political Interest	Ideological Identification	Partisan Identification
Sarah	White	55 or older	Master's Degree	Very Interested	Liberal	Democrat
Anna	White	18-25	College Graduate	Interested	Extremely Conservative	Republican
Brenda	White	26-30	College Graduate	Somewhat Interested	Slightly Conservative	Independent (Republican leaning)
Jessica	Black	31-39	College Graduate	Very Interested	Moderate	Independent (Democrat leaning)
Ethan	White	30-39	Master's Degree	Very Interested	Slightly Liberal	Independent (Democrat leaning)
Cynthia	Hispanic	31-39	Doctorate	Very Interested	Slightly Liberal	Democrat
Charles	White	55 or older	College Graduate	Very Interested	Moderate	Republican
Robert	White	26-30	Doctorate	Interested	Slightly Liberal	Democrat

It is important to acknowledge how the composition of each group meeting likely affected my research observations. Most notably, my groups were more educated than the general population and also more interested in politics. With any research method there are selection effects that are beyond the control of the researcher. Given the time commitment involved with meeting I am not at all surprised that participants were more interested in politics than the average citizen. Still, this group was informative to observe because high sophisticates are also more likely to engage in politics. From this perspective, I was observing the reactions of citizens who are most likely to encounter these arguments and integrate them into their understanding of political debates.

At the same time, I am aware that these individuals reflect a narrow subset of the population. However, given my claim that political storytelling acts as an information shortcut, I

believe presenting these stories to political sophisticates is likely a tougher case study of the effect of political storytelling on political beliefs, behavior and information processing. Indeed, political sophisticates are likely more aware of the partisan positions. Given this, I believe any shifts in the intensity of attitudes highly politically engaged individuals that I observe in my initial anecdotal test should provide even more compelling evidence in support of my claims about the effect of political storytelling.

Similar arguments could be made about the educational attainment of my participants. Indeed, the participants in my study are far more educated than the average citizen. Given their educational background, it is likely that my participants were predisposed to be more skeptical of information that they read as compared to less educated citizens. Moreover, these individuals may have less experience with the social welfare system given their relatively privileged position in society. Thus, it appears that once again the subset of the population included in my focus group meetings may be a tougher case to test the effects of storytelling.

Finally, the age and racial composition of the group participants may have influenced participants' reaction to political stories. Older participants may have had more extensive knowledge and experience with social welfare programs that made their views of the merits of drug-testing more difficult to move. As it relates to race, all four of my African American participants were women. My remaining participants of color identified as Hispanic. Given their identity group, these participants may have been more likely than their counterparts to be the targets of stereotyping about public assistance. To the extent that this was true of their experiences, these individuals may have formed stronger pre-existing opinions than their White counterparts. I was mindful of these dynamics throughout the focus group meeting.

4.5 Focus Group Meeting Procedure

All three focus group meetings were hosted in an office space on the Vanderbilt campus. Upon entering the meeting room, each participant filled out a pre-stimulus written survey to establish their baseline attitudes about issues related to drug testing measures. They then read the focus group stimulus associated with that day's meeting. Appendix D includes the stimulus for each focus group meeting. After reading the stimulus, each participant filled out a post-stimulus survey that repeated the questions included in the pre-stimulus survey. After everyone completed the survey, we began our conversation about the stimulus. Each discussion lasted 90 minutes. After the discussion, participants filled out a form about their demographic characteristics. After submitting this form, each participant was given a $40 incentive for their time.

4.6 Drug Testing Policy Opinions

At the beginning of each focus group meeting, I asked participants to answer three questions about their views on drug testing welfare applicants. I used these answers to establish participants' baseline attitudes about drug testing policy proposals. All three questions ranged from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Participants responded to the following statements:

1. All adult welfare recipients should be drug tested.
2. Adult welfare recipients who test positive for illegal drugs should be denied welfare benefits.
3. It is unconstitutional to perform drug testing on welfare recipients.

I then asked participants to read the focus group stimulus. After they finished reading the stimulus they answered the three questions again. My goal in having respondents answer the same questions was to measure the effect of the ideas presented in the stimulus on their attitudes. I did not expect for there to be substantial changes in participants' attitudes given the short span of time they had to read the stimulus and think about their opinions. Indeed, most participants took no more than ten minutes to answer the questions and read the stimulus. Despite the short time span, one third of the focus group participants exhibited change in their pre and post-survey responses. This change occurred in two ways. In the first case, participants exhibited a change in the *intensity* of their policy views. For example, a participant may have reported that they "strongly disagreed" with a statement the first time they read it. However, the second time they read the statement they reported that they "disagreed" with the statement. In the second case, participants exhibited a change in the *direction* of their attitude. In this case, a participant may have reported that they "agreed" with a statement before reading the stimulus. However, after reading the stimulus and answering the question a second time, they no reported that they "disagreed" with the statement.

Table 10 presents aggregate statistics about group level attitude changes. As indicated in this table, participants in the *Protection of Rights* meeting were less likely to support drug testing welfare recipients after reading the focus group stimulus. As it relates to the second attitudinal measures, it appears participants in the *Protection of Rights* and *Stigmatizing the Poor* groups were less likely to support denying benefits to welfare recipients who test positive for drugs after reading the stimulus. This effect appears to have been more pronounced for Protection of Rights participants. Interestingly, the stimulus had the opposite effect on *Reality of Drug Use*

participants. After reading the stimulus, participants in this group were more likely to support denying benefits to welfare recipients who test positive for drugs. Finally, participants in the *Protection of Rights* and *Stigmatizing the Poor* groups were more likely to believe that it is unconstitutional to perform drug testing on welfare recipients after reading the stimulus. This shift was more pronounced for *Protection of Rights* participants.

At least one person in each focus group meeting exhibited some sort of change in their views about drug testing measures. Much of this change was concentrated in the *Protection of Rights* focus group meeting. Over half of the participants (four individuals) in this meeting displayed changes in their viewpoints. Two participants changed the direction of their support. The others exhibited shifts in the intensity of their attitudes.

I begin by describing the participants who changed the direction of their support after reading the focus group stimulus. When Betty first filled out the survey questions, she reported that she "strongly agreed" with the statement "all adult welfare recipients should be drug tested." However, after reading the *Protection of Rights* stimulus she reported that she only "agreed" with the statement. Moreover, Betty reported that she "strongly disagreed" with the statement "It is unconstitutional to perform drug testing on welfare recipients" before she read the stimulus. After reading the stimulus she reported that she "agreed" with the statement. Thus, Betty shifted both the intensity and direction of her opinions after reading the stimulus.

Table 10: Mean Attitude Change in Pre and Post-Stimulus Measures by Focus Group Meeting

	Pre-Stimulus	Post -Stimulus	Difference
Support for drug testing adult welfare recipients			
Reality of Drug Use	1.67	1.67	.00
Protection of Rights	2.00	1.71	-.29
Stigmatizing the Poor	1.75	1.75	.00
Support for denying benefits to welfare recipients who test positive for drugs			
Reality of Drug Use	1.67	2.00	.33
Protection of Rights	2.14	1.71	-.43
Stigmatizing the Poor	1.50	1.38	-.12
Belief that it is unconstitutional to perform drug testing on welfare recipients			
Reality of Drug Use	2.00	2.00	.00
Protection of Rights	2.43	2.86	.43
Stigmatizing the Poor	2.25	2.38	.13

Anthony followed a similar trend. When he first filled out the survey questions, Anthony reported that he "agreed" with the statement "adult welfare recipients who test positive for illegal drugs should be denied welfare benefits." After reading the *Protection of Rights* stimulus, however, he stated that he "disagreed" with the statement. In other words, Anthony reversed the

direction of his support for denying welfare benefits to adult welfare recipients who test positive for drugs.

Daniel and Sharon changed the intensity of their views after reading the *Protection of Rights* stimulus. Daniel first reported that he "agreed" with the statement "adult welfare recipients who test positive for illegal drugs should be denied welfare benefits." After reading the stimulus, he changed his response to "neither agree nor disagree." Finally, the first time she was asked Sharon expressed that she "neither agreed nor disagreed" with the statement "All adult welfare recipients should be drug tested." The second time she was asked, Sharon reported that she "disagreed" with the statement. Thus, Daniel became more ambivalent in his attitudes while Sharon's views were crystalized.

The remaining individuals who exhibited changes in their attitudes were part of the *Reality of Drug Use* and the *Stigmatizing the Poor* meetings. Both Barbara and Susan from the *Reality of Drug Use* meeting shifted the intensity of their viewpoints after reading the stimulus. When Barbara first answered the survey questions, she reported that she "strongly disagreed" with the statement "All adult welfare recipients should be drug tested." After reading the stimulus, she stated that she "disagreed" with this statement. Susan exhibited the same shift in viewpoint.

The final participant to exhibit a change in their viewpoints was Anna from the *Stigmatizing the Poor* meeting. Anna first said that she "strongly agreed" with the statement "Adult welfare recipients who test positive for illegal drugs should be denied welfare benefits." After reading the stimulus she said that she "agreed" with this statement.

As it relates to the effect of narrative information on individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose policy proposals, five Democrats exhibited changes in their pre and

post-stimulus survey responses. Two Democrats, Betty and Anthony, reversed the direction of their support for drug testing after reading the stimulus. Four Democrats, Betty, Sharon, Barbara and Susan exhibited shifts in the intensity of their support for drug testing. Interestingly, two Republicans, Daniel and Anna, exhibited changes in the intensity of their pre and post-stimulus survey responses.

These findings provide some tentative support for my hypothesis that political arguments presented in the narrative format may influence support for policy proposals. However, more evidence is needed to specify *how* these stories influenced attitudes. What were the specific details that participants took into account when expressing their viewpoints? While these focus group findings are not generalizable to the entire population, I begin to explore the link between political storytelling and persuasion

4.7 Observing the Important Aspects of Storytelling

The first goal of the focus group meetings was to observe the aspects of political stories that seem to capture individuals' attention and influence how they process this information. My findings from the *Reality of Drug Use* focus group meeting suggest there were at least two aspects of political stories that captured participants' attention and influenced their views about drug testing proposals. First, participants focused on the presence of a clear moral justification motivating policy proposals. Second, participants looked for a well-defined articulation of how the moral justification was related to the broader political argument being advanced through political stories.

From the outset of the focus group meeting, it was evident that participants were skeptical of the motivations behind drug testing legislative proposals and the arguments associated with these measures. When I asked participants their initial reaction to the stimulus text, they immediately expressed skepticism about the underlying motivations of these proposals. This skepticism was reflected in comments about the text "painting a broad stroke", the "need to know what the motivation is for the legislation" and the shared desire to have more information. For instance, Susan shared her view that the statistics presented about the prevalence of drug use "frankly just do not make a difference." Instead, she stated "we need to know what the motivation is for the legislation. Was it to try…and intervene and help people who have drug addictions?" Susan was seeking a moral justification for implementing drug testing procedures. It became obvious that the absence of this moral justification made it difficult for her to integrate the evidence marshaled by lawmakers on both side of the issue. Indeed, she explained "If it's a public policy issue, I feel like the whole piece of how it's helping the public, is this for the public good, was just gone."

James expressed a similar critique. Adding to Susan's comments he shared his opinion that "We know what the proposed solution is but it doesn't propose a result." He continued, "Like okay, here's the problem. Here we're gonna fix it with putting this legislation in. But what do we think the results are going to be?" He wondered if the result was "to help these families that need help with drug addiction" or "are the results going to be that we need to save money by not giving money to these people who are addicted to drugs?" He concluded that the policy proposal lacks "a goal-oriented result."

In the absence of this moral justification, participants relied on their previous beliefs and experiences to fill the void. Linda shared her belief that drug testing policies are meant to target

African American women who are unmarried and have kids. She admitted that it may also affect other poor people but said "from my experience, and things that have happened personally to my daughter, that's been the dynamic."

Linda told the group about the birth of her grandson Paul. She explained that after her daughter gave birth, the doctors were supposed to return to the room immediately after the delivery but they did not. She shared her feelings of fear and uncertainty as the family waited. Her grandson's father finally tracked down a doctor who said the newborn's oxygen was low. After several hours of waiting the doctors came in and said Paul's blood was shunting, and as a result, blood was not reaching his lungs. They found out later that Paul was a meconium baby but she said "to this day they haven't said that." Linda's grandson stayed in the hospital for two weeks as doctors weaned him off the drugs they gave him as a result of his complicated birth.

Two weeks after Paul was released from the hospital there was a knock on Linda's daughter's door at two in the morning. Apparently the doctors had called child protective services. They reported Linda's daughter as a potential drug user. Now child protective services agents were in her daughter's living room asking Linda's daughter to take a drug test. She did. The test was negative. When Linda and her daughter went to the Department of Child Protection Services the next day, they learned that the investigation was triggered by Paul testing positive for opiates. According to Linda, in all the confusion surrounding Paul's complicated birth, doctors took blood after they gave him medication to address the fecal matter he consumed in utero.

According to Linda, the lesson she gleaned from this experience is that if you are African American, a woman and unmarried, you are more likely to be treated with contempt by state workers. Her experience with state workers led her to express the view that while it is not right to

test anybody for drugs, if you are going to implement these measures, then everybody should have to submit to these procedures.

James also shared a personal story. In the story, he recounted his childhood experience being on welfare. He told the group that his mother received food stamps. He also stated that his mother struggled with alcoholism. He recalled that when the family's food stamps came, she would buy a pack of gum with a $5 food stamp bill and get the change so she could buy cigarettes. He also remembered growing up in Louisiana with no air conditioner because their electricity was cut off. He lamented, "It was so hot." He argued that if the government would have just paid their electricity bill directly instead of providing a lump sum "we wouldn't have to worry about suffering through it. We could leave the air conditioner on all day and not have to worry about it being 112 degrees." Thus, James' experience watching his mother defraud the system led him to believe that public assistance funds should be closely regulated. In fact, he suggested an overhaul of the system and the implementation of a process where public assistance funds are directly routed to landlords and utility agencies and never touch welfare recipients' hands.

Barbara also shared her experience receiving unemployment. She told the group that when she received unemployment she was not allowed to take college courses. Instead, she had to attend a job-training program. This rule was particularly frustrating for Barbara because she was just a few hours short of receiving her bachelor's degree. She argued that allowing her to finish her degree would have made her a more productive citizen in the long run. Barbara's experience led her to believe that social services programs tend to degrade individuals' sense of dignity. She said, "I think as a society, sometimes we target people because, after all, they're not working. But you don't know why. They could be on disability. They might not have the

sophistication or job skills." She argued that too often these programs are punitive instead of trying to help people get ready to get a job.

Thus, it was clear during the focus group discussion that, in the absence of clearly defined moral justifications for policy measures, participants filled in the blanks with their own personal experiences. This observation lends credence to the suggestion that it is likely not just the narrative format that influences levels of engagement but the combination of story characters and clearly defined moral justifications that directly connect with the broader arguments being championed through political storytelling.

To dig deeper into the moral rationales that might lead individuals to consider viewpoints that opposed their pre-existing beliefs, I introduced two "moral principle" interventions whose goal was to provide some of the moral rationale the participants sought. First, I asked the group:

> First, some supporters of drug testing measures argue that rampant drug use among welfare recipients negatively affects the children of welfare recipients. Given this, they argue that passing such legislation will protect innocent children who may be living in households with drug addicted parents who are not using state funds on food and clothing like they are supposed to. What do you think of this argument?

James immediately rejected the characterization of drug use as rampant. He questioned, "where are the data? Because the data we just read here, that's not the case when you're talking about 2.6 percent of people. That's not rampant." James was referring to the political story surrounding the outcome of Florida's drug testing program that was featured in the *Reality of Drug* stimulus. The text read, "After passing drug testing measures in 2011, Florida state data revealed that only 108 out of 4,086 people who were tested—or 2.6 percent—were found to have been using narcotics."

Barbara questioned how exactly one is saving the child in this context. She explained, "What are you doing if you are just cutting off funds? That's not doing anything to help the child. In fact, it's probably making the situation worse." Taken together, these responses suggest that it is likely not only the presence of a moral justification but a well-defined articulation of how the moral justification is relevant to the broader argument being championed in political stories.

The second moral intervention I introduced provides some evidence in support of this conclusion. This intervention asked participants to consider the argument that even if drug abuse among welfare recipients is a small problem, it is still worth it to implement these procedures because it is unfair that people who would genuinely benefit from government services might not receive these benefits because limited government resources are being used by others to purchase drugs.

Different from the previous question, this moral justification made Susan more willing to consider the issue of drug testing from multiple perspectives. Prior to this question, Susan was adamant in her opposition to drug testing procedures. For her, the motivation behind these legislative proposals was unclear and as a result she expressed deep skepticism. James was initially supportive of the idea of drug testing but when the conversation turned to how to fund the program he concluded that any money saved by denying drug users benefits would probably be offset by the costs associated with implementing the program. However, after I introduced the second moral intervention, James shared,

> If we are helping those who need help, I don't think the money [spent to implement testing procedures] is important. If you're spending $7 million dollars and the 2.6 [percent of welfare recipients abusing drugs] you found, you are able to help and get the family off drugs, and get them the help they needed, then the

> money is spent correctly. And I don't think people---well, I know I wouldn't have a problem spending that extra money if the result is positive.

In other words, this moral intervention helped connect legislative proposals with a policy goal. Given this clarity, he was now able to "see both sides." Susan still expressed deep concerns about the effect of diverting resources on children, however she was also willing to talk through claims that drug testing might be an effective preventative measure for some of the country's most difficult social problems. Thus, while she was never fully devoid of skepticism, interjecting a relevant moral argument made her more willing to listen and consider both sides.

Taken together, these findings suggest political stories that are poorly constructed (in terms of clearly outline the motivation of lawmaker and the relevance of these justifications to the argument being championed) may actually lead individuals to counterargue the claims of political storytellers. Both James and Susan's responses suggest that it is likely the combination of the narrative format, story characters and well-reasoned moral principles and political values that work together to motivate individuals to carefully consider viewpoints at odds with their pre-existing beliefs.

The *Stigmatizing the Poor* focus group meeting participants also sought a clear moral justification motivating policy proposals. For instance, when I asked participants their initial reactions to the text they read, Jessica immediately focused on the political story used by drug testing supporters to illustrate their argument that "drug testing measures force mothers and fathers to take seriously their role as parents and abandon unhealthy habits." In the story, participants learned about Estefana Arma, a 30-year-old mother of three who struggled with depression and was forced to turn to welfare. In the text, readers are told that "advocates believe the stipulations placed on Estefana's assistance encouraged her to seek out support groups, earn a

GED, and eventually enroll in community college." The text continues, "For them, the knowledge that she could be cut off from benefits motivated Estefana to be proactive about changing her life circumstance."

Jessica immediately questioned the assumption that drug testing is "a method of motivation." Instead, she argued "it's more like a fear and intimidation kind of tactic." Jessica repeatedly pushed back against the notion that drug testing motivates welfare recipients to change their behavior during the course the meeting. In fact, toward the end of the discussion, Jessica re-directed the group's attention back to the sentence "the knowledge that she could be cut off from benefits motivated her to be proactive." She shared that this phrasing suggests that "welfare recipients are not motivated in and of themselves." She concluded that while there are some people who do abuse drugs, Estefana's story is overly simplistic in illustrating this claim.

Charles also expressed skepticism about the reasons motivating proposals to implement drug testing procedures. He questioned if these measures were really an attempt to reduce welfare rolls. And if so, he considered whether that would be a good thing. Charles filled the gap in testing supporters' motivations with an interpretation gleaned from his own personal experiences. In particular, he recalled taking the train to 30th Street in Philadelphia everyday and seeing a homeless man outside the station who was begging for money. Charles shared that he would buy the man breakfast once or twice a week. As he got to know the man better, Charles learned that the man actually had a job at McDonald's but couldn't afford to make ends meet so he turned to street begging. Charles used this story to express his view that welfare is "a really complex issue." Given this complexity, he "really questioned" what lawmakers were attempting to achieve by implementing drug testing for welfare. He doubted the motivation was to reduce drug abuse. Thus, similar to Linda, James and Barbara during the *Reality of Drug Use* focus

group meeting, Charles interjected his own political story when the claims of the story he read in the stimulus fell short.

Different from the aforementioned groups, participants in the *Protection of Rights* meeting were less skeptical about the motivations behind drug testing proposals. For them, claims about issues of individuals' constitutional right to privacy seemed a reasonable lens through which one would assess the merits of drug testing proposals. Participants' lack of skepticism likely reflects long-standing debates about the balance of individual freedom and government oversight.

4.8 Observing the Effect of Stereotype-Consistent and Inconsistent Political Storytelling

4.8.1 Reactions to Stereotype-Consistent Political Storytelling

The second goal of the focus group meetings was to observe how participants reacted to stereotype-consistent and inconsistent representations of the targets of drug testing policy proposals. Focus group participants immediately brought up the issue of stereotyping when asked about their reactions to the political stories featured in the stimulus they read. For example, Ethan, who participated in the *Stigmatizing the Poor* meeting, observed that testing supporters seem to have chosen Estefana's story to "fill the stereotype of what they were looking for: someone who doesn't have an education that doesn't have a job." For Ethan, testing supporters were "just reinforcing that stereotype." Recall the political story described Estefana Armas, a 30-year-old mother of three who struggled with debilitating depression and was forced to turn to welfare. In the story, testing advocates argue the stipulations that were placed on Estefana's public assistance "encouraged her to seek out support groups, earn a GED, and eventually enroll in

community college." For them, the knowledge that she could be cut off from benefits motivated Estefana to be proactive about changing her life circumstance.

Participants' references to this story also illustrate the continued relevance of the "welfare queen" stereotype within the current political context. Barbara, who participated in the *Reality of Drug Use* meeting, shared her perception that "a lot of people" think they have to work everyday "so why should she stay home?" She recalled that many people have heard stories about "welfare queens with Cadillacs and all this stuff." These stories, she explained, lead individuals to express the view "I have to earn my money, so why shouldn't they have to have to do anything?" According to Barbara, these depictions tend to go untested because "we rarely hear the other side of the story—what got people in the spot they're in in the first place."

Interestingly, Brenda, who participated in the *Stigmatizing the Poor* focus group meeting, actually performed this stereotype in her remarks. She shared that she recently read a story in the news about a welfare recipient who used their SNAP benefits to purchase lobster. Brenda stated "I don't know that it's *wrong* to be upset by that." She told the group that she was an administrative assistant and her husband a graduate student. She explained, "We're not eating lobster. So, I don't know that not regulating is the best thing." Another participant in the group, Cynthia, shared her reaction to Brenda's viewpoint. She said, "I don't know that I care too much though. I mean, I see that point, but I also say, so they wanted to splurge on lobster maybe like somebody had a really great day and they wanted to celebrate."

Similar to Ethan, other participants in the *Stigmatizing the Poor* meeting reacted negatively to a stereotype-consistent political story. These reactions were unsurprising in light of the partisan composition of the group. The majority of participants were self-identified

Democrats, which means they were predisposed to oppose drug testing policy proposals. Participants were also highly educated. This combination of factors makes it unsurprising that the participants noticed these stereotypes and articulated reactions to them. Beyond Ethan's comments, Sarah shared her view that Estefana's story was "a simplistic spin on her motivation for turning her life around." She said that the story reminded her of previous leaders' attempts to invoke "fear in people about the welfare queen and the Cadillac" and that "these welfare people are taking something from me." Given this history, she found the use of Estefana's story by drug testing supporters to be "really distasteful." Also, as noted earlier, Jessica reacted negatively to this story. She believed that "there are probably some who do (abuse drugs)" however she perceived the story as "biased" owing to its "simplistic" depiction of Estefana's experience.

Interestingly, while drug testing advocates use of Estefana's story provoked negative reactions in the *Stigmatizing the Poo*r meeting, another stereotype-consistent political story seems to have provoked empathetic feelings in the *Protection of Rights* group meeting. When asked her initial reaction to the stimulus, Betty shared her thoughts about the political story featuring Lazhanae Johnson. In the story, Lazahanae is described as a single mother and former inmate who gave birth to nine children and, soon after, turned them over to the State. Through the story, participants learn that several of Johnson's children faced great difficulties as wards of the State. One died as a toddler and two others went missing. In the text, testing supporters use Lazhanae's story to argue that implementing drug testing measures could have helped state workers identify Lazhanae so that they could intervene to help her and possibly save her children. Betty had a strong visceral reaction to this story. She explained that the story "raised some feelings in me because there are many people who need these services and perhaps there are people who need these services who do have some substance abuse issues." She explained,

"In reading this article, it's probably difficult to separate the two—maybe *impossible* to separate it."

Thus, unlike from Sarah and Jessica, Betty reacted to the story character rather than the storyteller. It is unclear why the participants would choose to focus on the storyteller or story character in this case. This difference could stem from Betty's negative experience with child protective services. Unfortunately it is impossible to tell in this case, however this illustration does suggest that individuals' prior experiences likely influence how they process political stories.

4.8.2 Reactions to Stereotype-Inconsistent Political Storytelling

I now turn to my findings regarding the effect of political stories that present stereotype-inconsistent portrayals of the targets of policy proposals. My observations provide some anecdotal evidence in support of my hypothesis that stereotype-inconsistent depictions of the targets of policy proposals that are positive will send cues about the deservingness of these individuals. Most relevant are Protection of Rights focus group participants' reactions to the political story featuring Luis Lebron. In the story, participants are told that Lebron is a Navy veteran, full-time student and single father who provides care for his disabled mother. They also learn that Lebron filed for public assistance in 2011. During the application process he refused to submit to a drug test because he believed it was unfair to force him to be tested when nothing in his past suggests he was prone to drug use.

Lebron's story offers a stereotype-inconsistent illustration of the targets of policy proposal that is positive. First, he is a man. Second, he is a Navy veteran. Third, he is a single father. Finally, he is a full-time student. When asked to share their thoughts about this story, focus group participants reacted both strongly and positively. Anthony shared that as he read, he

imagined in his mind that Lebron was a "clean cut guy. You know, [facing] unfortunate circumstances [but] is doing the best that he can to make sure that the situation is right." He continued, "And in my mind, and I could be wrong about his description, someone who has never had an issue with the law. Someone who has never, at least from the writing, to me does not come across as someone who might have had a substance abuse problem or any problem regarding issues of the law."

Thus, it appears that the description of Lebron in the story conveyed implicit messages to participants about his character and moral deservingness. For instance, there was no mention of Lebron's physical appearance in the story yet Anthony imagines him to be clean cut. Moreover, the story provides no discussion of the impetus behind his application for public assistance, yet Anthony concludes that Lebron has simply fallen on hard times and is need of a bit of help. Finally, Anthony perceives that Lebron has never had a substance abuse problem when the only evidence in support of this conclusion is that Lebron *says* he has never had a problem with substance abuse. Anthony also seemed to be influenced by the fact that Lebron was a Navy veteran. He shared, "As I read Navy veteran, I'm seeing words like that, I'm thinking: 'Oh, this is an honorable man'. Right? And it's easy for me to just say, 'oh yea , this is someone who is good'."

Anthony quickly noticed the assumptions he made after I asked the group to articulate the impression these stories had on them as they read. Anthony expressed how he assumed these positive attributes about Lebron when, in reality, "we don't know what happened before that time." He shared that there are a range of reasons why one might choose to enlist in the Navy. He explained, "I don't know if he's someone who had disciplinary issues and then decided to go into the Navy to get himself straightened out. You know there's a lot of different situations where

you really can't. I don't know his past." He shared that when I first asked about their responses to the political stories he hadn't considered this information.

Carol agreed with Anthony. She had a similar visual in her mind when reading the story. Lisa wondered aloud how their reactions might have changed if the sentence that described Lebron as a Navy veteran, full-time student, caretaker for his disabled mother and single father were removed from the story. She asked fellow participants, "Would we have had the same stances?" The group collectively agreed that they would not have reacted the same. I asked Lisa to say more about why that description was so influential. She explained, "Because this a person that we're vying for because he sounds like a good guy." She shared that it was "kinda interesting seeing how they put it in here and how it can change our views."

4.9 Discussion

Taken together, the observations I gleaned from my focus group meetings provide some support for the distinct effect of presenting information in the narrative format. However, my observations suggest there are caveats to the narrative effect. Most notably, these stories must have clearly-defined moral justifications to influence individuals' thinking. Moreover, I found initial anecdotal evidence in support of my hypothesis that stereotype-inconsistent depictions of the targets of policy proposals that are positive will send cues about the deservingness of these individuals. Moreover, it appears that positive stereotype-inconsistent depictions led individuals to consider opposing arguments more carefully.

Interestingly, the anecdotal evidence presented in this chapter provides some corroborating evidence of Fisher's concept of narrative rationality. Recall that Fisher argues that narrative rationality turns on individuals' perceptions of how well stories "hang together" (narrative

probability) and reflect "accurate representation" of social reality (narrative fidelity). Throughout the focus group meetings, there was clear evidence of individuals performing these evaluations. When Jessica questioned the premise in Estefana's political story that testing measures motivated welfare recipients to find work, she was calling into question the narrative probability. For her, the story failed to "hang together" in its claim about the psychological benefits of testing measures. Moreover, when participants interjected their own personal experiences in the focus group discussion, they were assessing how well the political stories they read seemed to reflect their understanding of the challenges facing welfare recipients. This form of reaching seems to align well with Fisher's concept of narrative fidelity.

However, as I noted in my discussion of the demographic composition of meetings, the individuals who participated reflect a small subset of the population. Given this, it is more difficult to discern whether these effects might generalize across a wide range of groups in society. Moreover, given the group setting, individuals may have felt compelled to "perform" in the small meeting space. In the next chapter, I present a more rigorous test of the effect of stereotype-inconsistent political stories on political beliefs and behavior.

CHAPTER FIVE: AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST OF THE EFFECT OF STORYTELLING ON POLITICAL BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOR

5.1 Overview

In previous chapters, I argued that political stories should have a distinct effect on political beliefs, behavior and information processing relative to thematic political frames. More specifically, I argued that stereotype-inconsistent political stories that positively depict the targets of policy proposals should make individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose the policy more likely to express feeling mentally involved with the storyline. I also asserted these stories should make individuals more likely to perceive that the story subject matter is relevant to their lives and express empathy toward the targets of policy proposals. I claimed these positive affective responses, in turn, should lead individuals to rely on perceptions of deservingness rather than their partisan disposition when expressing their policy views.

I argued stereotype-inconsistent political stories that negatively depict the targets of policy proposals should have the opposite effect. These stories should provide negative cues about the deservingness of the targets of policy proposals that lead individuals to perceive that these individuals are responsible for their current predicament. I argued these blame attributions, in turn, should lead individuals to rely on their negative affective responses when expressing their policy views.

This chapter presents the findings of an empirical study I employed to test these hypotheses. More specifically, I fielded a survey experiment that presented participants with a stereotype-inconsistent portrayal of the targets of medical marijuana policy

proposals: lung cancer patients. Participants read one of three versions of arguments related to the benefits of marijuana for this group. The first version is a political frame that discusses lung cancer patients in abstract terms. The remaining versions portray John Smith, a cancer patient whose life choices may have led to his diagnosis. I expect my "life choices" manipulation will send cues about John Smith's deservingness to survey participants that influence their subsequent policy opinions and behavior.

5.2 Study Hypotheses

In my theoretical account of political storytelling, I focus on the effect of narrative political arguments on individuals whose partisan affiliation predisposes them to opposing policy measures. In general, I expect political arguments that are presented in the narrative format will lead individuals to feel more mentally involved with subject matter and more greatly perceive the relevance of the story subject matter to their lives.

More than this, I expect stereotype-inconsistent political stories that depict the targets of medical marijuana policy proposals as not having made life choices that led to their diagnosis will lead individuals who are predisposed to oppose policy measures to express greater empathy toward the targets of policy proposals. I argue this occurs because these stories send unexpected cues about the deservingness of the targets of policy proposals. In this story, the account of the cancer patient's life choices suggests they are undeserving of their medical diagnosis.

On the other hand, I expect stereotype-inconsistent political stories that depict the targets of medical marijuana policy proposals as having made life choices that may have led to their diagnosis will have the opposite effect. In this story, the account of the cancer

patient's life choices suggests they may be deserving of their medical diagnosis. In both cases, I expect the affective responses that stem from these characterizations will influence subsequent political beliefs and behavior. More specifically, in the current study I test the following hypotheses:

- **"Story Involvement" Hypothesis**: Republicans who are exposed to a medical marijuana political story will be more likely to express feeling mentally involved with the story subject matter than Republicans who are exposed to non-narrative format political information.

- **"Story Impact" Hypothesis**: Republicans who are exposed to a medical marijuana political story will be more likely to perceive the story subject matter as being relevant to their lives than Republicans who are exposed to non-narrative format political information.

- **"Evoking Empathy" Hypothesis**: Republicans who are exposed to an undeserving cancer patient will be more likely to express empathy for the target of policy proposals than Republicans who are exposed to a deserving cancer patient.

- **"Effect of Narrative on Beliefs" Hypothesis:** Republicans who are exposed to an undeserving cancer patient will be more likely to express support for legalizing medical marijuana than Republicans who are exposed to a deserving cancer patient.

- **"Effect of Narrative on Behavior" Hypothesis:** Republicans who are exposed to an undeserving cancer patient will be more likely to report plans to engage in political activities related to the story subject matter than Republicans who are exposed to a deserving cancer patient.

Beyond these hypotheses, I also test Iyengar and Stone's rival explanations of the effect of stories on individuals' attributions of responsibility for policy problems. Recall that Iyengar argues that anecdotal information makes individuals less likely to blame the government for social problems. Different from Iyengar, Stone argues that stories make it easier for political actors to convey the causes of policy problems to the electorate. Consequently, she contends that stories make it easier for the public to attribute blame for social problems.

Finally, building on my focus group observations, I explore the effect of political stories on the cognitive resources individuals are willing to devote to processing political arguments related to medical marijuana legislative proposals and discussing their reactions to this information.

5.3 Analytical Strategy and Procedure

To test my hypotheses about the effect of political storytelling on individuals whose partisanship predisposes them to reject medical marijuana policy proposals, I

fielded an online survey experiment in May 2016. I employed a survey experiment because this method allows researchers to address causal effects (Druckman et al. 2011). In this methodological approach, respondents are randomly assigned to different treatment conditions which act as interventions during the course of an opinion survey. Randomly assigning survey participants to treatment conditions enables researchers to estimate the average treatment effect of these interventions by comparing the average outcome in each group.

Qualtrics, a private research software company, recruited my survey participants. The sample included 300 Republicans, 148 Republican-leaning Independents, 300 Democrats and 152 Democratic-leaning Independents. Eighteen respondents were removed from the analysis because an attention check suggested they were distracted. Following literature that suggests pure partisans and leaners ultimately behave in a similar fashion, I collapse the two groups in my analysis (Keith et al. 1992).

My analysis focuses on Republicans given public opinion data presented in Chapter Three that suggests Republicans tend to express greater opposition to medical marijuana than Democrats. The Republican sample was 64% women, ranging in age from 20 to 80 or older (M=51.15 SD=12.31). I also analyze the effect of political stories on Democrats as a point of comparison in the study. The Democrat sample was 73% women, ranging in age from 19 to 80 or older (M=48.44 SD=13.70).

I employed a 3x2 between-subjects experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to a thematic political frame, deserving political story, or undeserving political story that presented arguments that legalizing medical marijuana will reduce the

discomfort of cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. Table 9 describes the number of Republicans and Democrats in each treatment condition.

Table 11: Democrats and Republicans by Treatment Condition

	Republicans	Democrats
Thematic Political Frame	159	132
Deserving Political Story	143	150
Undeserving Political Story	137	161
N	439	443

In the beginning of the study, participants answered several questions about their demographic characteristics such as their age, racial background, educational background and income. They also answered questions about their partisan identification, trust in government, political interest and authoritarian disposition.

Subsequently, participants read text that recounted arguments about the potential for medical marijuana to reduce the discomfort associated with chemotherapy for cancer patients. There were three versions of this text. The first "political frame" version features a thematic political frame that discusses lung cancer patients in abstract terms. The second "deserving" version features a cancer patient named John Smith who is described as a heavy smoker and drinker. The third "undeserving" version features a cancer patient named John Smith who is described as a healthy eater and long-distance runner.

After reading the text, participants were asked about their engagement with the story. Soon after, respondents shared their emotional reactions to cancer patients. Respondents then answered three policy opinion questions. Finally, respondents reported

their desire to learn more information about efforts to legalize medical marijuana and intent to engage in several political activities related to the legalization of medical marijuana.

5.3.1 Study Materials

The medical marijuana experimental stimuli were all created for use in this study. To ensure that any observed effects were a result of including narrative arguments and not differences in political information, the treatment text was identical except for the experimental manipulation. The following is the text presented to those randomly assigned to the political frame condition:

> **Fighting for Medical Marijuana**
>
> LEXINGTON— Feeling nauseated is normal for **medical patients diagnosed with lung cancer**. Nausea is a side of effect of the chemotherapy treatments they must endure. Some of these patients recently noticed the drug their doctor prescribed to minimize their discomfort was losing its effect. Several of them have turned to marijuana to manage their pain. Unfortunately, marijuana remains illegal in several states and under federal law. Some patients fear being prosecuted, and are asking legislators in their state to consider legislation that would legalize marijuana for medical use and protect qualifying patients from arrest. State legislators who support the legislation argue the government should not prevent those suffering from debilitating diseases from seeking treatment that would minimize the pain they experience on a daily basis. Opponents of medical marijuana argue there is not yet sufficient scientific evidence to support claims that marijuana alleviates the symptoms associated with several medical diagnoses.

In the undeserving political story condition, I added concrete information about a cancer patient, 36-year-old John Smith who was diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago. The text describes John's family's response to his cancer diagnosis. In the text, John

is described as a long distance runner and healthy eater. In other words, John's lifestyle choices seem *at odds* with those of individuals typically diagnosed with lung cancer. The following is the text presented to those randomly assigned to the undeserving story condition:

> **Fighting for Medical Marijuana**
>
> LEXINGTON— **John Smith, 36 was diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago. John's diagnosis was a surprise to his family and friends. For much of his adult life, John has been a long distance runner and healthy eater. Feeling nauseated is normal for John.** Nausea is a side of effect of the chemotherapy treatments he must endure. John recently noticed the drug his doctor prescribed to minimize the discomfort was losing its effect. He turned to marijuana to manage his pain. Unfortunately, marijuana remains illegal in his home state and under federal law. John fears being prosecuted and is asking legislators in his state to consider legislation that would legalize marijuana for medical use and protect qualifying patients from arrest. State legislators who support the legislation argue the government should not prevent those suffering from debilitating diseases from seeking treatment that would minimize the pain they experience on a daily basis. Opponents of medical marijuana argue there is not yet sufficient scientific evidence to support claims that marijuana alleviates the symptoms associated with several medical diagnoses.

The deserving political story similarly featured concrete information about 36-year-old John Smith who was diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago. Different from the undeserving treatment, however, John is described as a heavy drinker and a regular cigarette smoker. In other words, John's lifestyle choices may have contributed to his lung cancer diagnosis. The following is the text presented to those randomly assigned to the deserving story condition:

Fighting for Medical Marijuana

LEXINGTON— **John Smith, 36 was diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago. John's diagnosis was a surprise to his family and friends. For much of his adult life, John has been a heavy drinker who regularly smokes cigarettes. Feeling nauseated is normal for John.** Nausea is a side of effect of the chemotherapy treatments he must endure. John recently noticed the drug his doctor prescribed to minimize the discomfort was losing its effect. He turned to marijuana to manage his pain. Unfortunately, marijuana remains illegal in his home state and under federal law. John fears being prosecuted and is asking legislators in his state to consider legislation that would legalize marijuana for medical use and protect qualifying patients from arrest. State legislators who support the legislation argue the government should not prevent those suffering from debilitating diseases from seeking treatment that would minimize the pain they experience on a daily basis. Opponents of medical marijuana argue there is not yet sufficient scientific evidence to support claims that marijuana alleviates the symptoms associated with several medical diagnoses.

5.2.4 Study Measures

To assess story involvement, I used three items from Green and Brock's narrative transportation scale with responses recorded on a scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Story involvement captures respondents' perceptions of distraction, feelings of being mentally involved in the text while reading it and report of the degree to which their mind wandered while reading the text (M=8.41 SD=3.44 α=.82). To assess story impact, I used four items from Green and Brock's narrative transportation scale. Similar to the story involvement measure, responses were recorded on a scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Story impact captures respondents' belief that the subject matter of the text is relevant to their lives (M=12.42 SD=5.18 α=.88).

I also included a question that inquired about participants' feelings of compassion toward cancer patients discussed in the stimulus. More specifically,

they were asked: “How compassionate did you feel for cancer patients asking legislators in their home state to pass legislation that would legalize medical marijuana?” Responses were recorded on a scale ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 3(Very) (*M*=2.44 *SD*=.79).

To estimate attitudes about the legalization of medical marijuana I included three separate attitudinal measures. The first item asked respondents: “Do you support or oppose legalizing marijuana for medical use?” Responses were recorded on a 0 (strongly oppose) to 4 (strongly support) scale (*M*=3.11 *SD*=1.17). The second item asked respondents: “Do you think marijuana does or does not have legitimate uses?” Responses were recorded on a 0 (Does Not) to 1 (Does) scale (*M*=.87 *SD*=.33). The third item asked respondents: “Do you think it should be legal or illegal for doctors to prescribe medical marijuana for their patients?” Responses were recorded on a 0 (Illegal) to 1 (Legal) scale (*M*=.85 *SD*=.35).

Next, I assessed participants’ behavioral intentions using several items ranging from 0 (Very Unlikely) to 6 (Very likely). These items included: giving money to an organization concerned with the legalization of medical marijuana, contacting a state representative, writing a Facebook status, signing a petition and writing a letter about legislative proposals to legalize medical marijuana. The participation index ranged from 0 to 4.28 (*M*=1.79 *SD*=1.23 α=.90). I also asked participants about their desire to learn more information about efforts to legalize medical marijuana: “Would you like to learn more information about states currently considering the legalization of medical marijuana? Responses were recorded on a 0 (No) to 1 (Yes) scale (*M*=.53 *SD*=.50).

I also inquired about participants' perceptions of who is to blame for the legal predicament facing cancer patients who want to use medical marijuana. This question was open response. From these responses, I created a dummy variable that took on the value 1 when participants blamed the government and zero otherwise. Government blame attributions included references to the federal government, state government, specific government officials and lawmakers more generally (*M*=.51 *SD*=.50).

Lastly, I included two cognitive engagement measures. The first measure tracks the number of seconds participants spent reading the experimental stimulus (*M*= 51.79 *SD*=59.16). The second measures documents the number of reactions participants wrote in response to drug testing policy proposals. Respondents were asked "What is the (first/second/third) thing that comes to mind when you think about legislative proposals to legalize medical marijuana?" (*M*=2.51 *SD*=.90) Table 12 presents descriptive statistics for these variables (reported in proportions) by treatment condition.

Table 12: Mean of Study Dependent Variables by Treatment Condition (All Respondents)

	Thematic Political Frame	Political Story	Difference
Narrative Engagement			
Story Involvement Index	.20	.20	.001 (.005)
Story Impact Index	**.21**	**.20**	**.01** **(.01)**
Emotional Reactions			
Compassion	.61	.61	.003 (.01)
Policy Attitudes			
Support for Legalization of Medical Marijuana	.62	.62	.01 (.02)
Legitimate Use of Medical Marijuana	.88	.87	.01 (.02)
Doctors Allowed to Prescribe Medical Marijuana to Patients	.84	.87	-.02 (.03)
Behavioral Measures			
Participation index	.26	.26	.001 (.01)
More Information	.56	.52	-.03 (.04)
Government Blame Attributions	.48	.53	-.06* (.04)
Cognitive Engagement Measures			
Treatment Reading Time	47.44	53.93	6.49* (4.23)
Number of Written Policy Reactions	**.60**	**.64**	**-.04** **(.02)**

*Standard errors in parentheses. Bolded coefficients are significant at p=.10 or lower.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Legalization of Medical Marijuana Political Stories and Narrative Engagement

I estimated regression models predicting self-identified Republican and Republican-leaning Independents' level of story involvement to test my expectation that presenting Republicans with a medical marijuana political story will make them more likely to feel mentally involve with the story subject matter than Republicans in the thematic political frame condition. More specifically, I regressed the story involvement index on the treatment condition variable. This variable took on the value one if respondents were randomly assigned to one of the two story conditions. The variable took on the value zero if respondents were randomly assigned to the thematic political frame condition. Given work that suggests that women are more receptive to narrative engagement, I control for gender in the model. For ease of interpretation, I report the results of my analysis in proportions.[1]

As indicated in Table 13, for self-identified Republicans and Republican-leaners the main treatment effect of the political stories was statistically indistinguishable from zero. Moreover, while the sign on the coefficient is in the expected direction, the effective size is miniscule. Given these findings, I find no evidence in support of my "story involvement" hypothesis. As a point of comparison, I replicated the analysis for Democrats and Democrat-leaning Independents. The results of this analysis are also presented in Table 13. Similar to Republicans, the main treatment effect is both small and statistically indistinguishable from zero. Interestingly, however the sign on the coefficient is negative for Democrats. These findings suggest that presenting information

[1] For ease in interpreting my findings, I report linear regression results. Similar findings emerge from logistic regression analysis.

in the narrative format may not have unique effects on individuals' self-perceptions of feeling mentally involved with the subject matter.

Table 13: Treatment Effect on Story Involvement by Party Affiliation and Treatment Condition

	Political Story	Political Frame	Difference	p	Political Story	Political Frame	Difference	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Story Involvement Index	.20	.20	.004 (.01)	.52	.20	.20	-.002 (.01)	.74
N	439				443			

Standard error in parentheses

Turning to my second hypothesis, I estimated a regression model predicting the effect of the political story on self-identified Republican and Republican-leaning Independents' beliefs about the relevance of the story subject matter to their lives. Recall that I hypothesized that Republicans who are exposed to a medical marijuana political story will be more likely to perceive the story subject matter to be relevant to their lives than Republicans in the thematic political frame condition.

As indicated in Table 14, the results of the analysis fail to provide support for my "story impact" hypothesis. Indeed, the main treatment is statistically indistinguishable from zero for Republican and Republican-leaning respondents. However, I find the medical marijuana political story does appear to influence Democrat respondents. More specifically, for Democrats the main treatment effect of the political story treatment was -.02 (p=.01). In other words, Democrats in the political story treatment condition were, on

average, two percent less likely to perceive that the story subject matter is relevant to their lives than Democrats in the thematic political frame condition. While this effect size is small, the sign on the coefficient is in the opposite direction than the literature would suggest.

Table 14: Treatment Effect on Story Impact by Party Affiliation and Treatment Condition

	Political Story	Political Frame	Difference	P	Political Story	Political Frame	Difference	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Story Impact Index	.22	.23	-.01 (.01)	.78	.19	.21	-.02 (.01)	.01
N	439				293			

Standard error in parentheses

My finding that only Democrats' level of narrative engagement seems to be influenced by exposure to a political story is in line with Appel et al. (2011) who contend that more conservative individuals tend to exhibit lower need for affect—a variable that has been shown to moderate the persuasive impact of a story. Indeed, Leone and Chirumbolo (2008) contend conservatives are more likely "to avoid or pursue less intense emotional experiences" as compared to liberals (757). They argue that this occurs because conservatives tend to "distrust intense emotionality." (Leone and Chirumbolo 2008, 757) The authors argue this distrust of emotionality is reflected in conservatives' preference for self-control, norm adherence, order and social stability (Leone and Chirumbolo 2008; also see Haidt 2012; Lakoff 1996). In other words, work in this area suggests that Republicans and Democrats may have different degrees of susceptibility to

narrative engagement. My study provides further evidence of this effect. Indeed, within the context of this study, it seems that only Democrats are more inclined to believe that the story subject matter is relevant to their lives after being exposed to political storytelling.

However, it is surprising that political stories seem to dampen Democrats' sense of narrative engagement. Given the focus on cancer patients who are suffering from painful side effects of chemotherapy, I would expect narrative engagement to be higher in the story condition than the thematic political frame. It could be the case that providing information about a specific cancer patient, John Smith, weakens narrative engagement because individuals tend to assess the attributes of that individual rather than a more abstract view of cancer patients. In the latter case, individuals may think about a friend or family member who was diagnosed with cancer. From this vantage point, it is less surprising that individuals would believe the subject matter is more relevant to their lives when talking about medical patients in an abstract manner. Indeed, there is literature on generosity and charitable contributions that suggests there can sometimes be a backlash effect of including identifiable individuals in fundraising campaigns (Kogut 2011; Kogut and Ritov 2010). This work suggests that providing too many details about story characters may backfire when engaging in political storytelling.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of self-reported survey measures when assessing narrative engagement. Indeed, much of the work on implicit cognition suggests that political objects influence thoughts and awareness outside of individuals' conscious awareness (Greenwald et al. 2009; Kam 2007; Mendelberg 2001; Pérez 2010, 2013). This research suggests that even though Republicans report not

feeling affected by a story, their observed behavior may provide a different account. For this reason, I included study measures that capture political beliefs and behavior as well as cognitive engagement measures. I report the findings of this analysis in subsequent sections of this chapter.

5.3.2 Empathetic Feelings toward Cancer Patients

I now turn to my third hypothesis regarding the effect of stereotype-inconsistent political stories on empathetic feelings for cancer patients. Recall that I hypothesized that Republicans who are presented with the undeserving political story will be more likely to express empathy for cancer patients than Republicans in the deserving political story condition. To operationalize empathetic feelings in my study I included a measure of compassion toward cancer patients. Respondents were asked how compassionate they felt for the cancer patients they read about in the stimulus. Responses were recorded on a scale from 0 (Not at All) to 1 (Very).

Table 15 presents the findings of the regression analysis. As indicated in the table, I do not find support for my "Evoking Empathy" hypothesis. The main treatment effect of the undeserving political story was statistically indistinguishable for Republicans. Interestingly, however, the sign on the coefficient suggests that Republicans were less likely to express compassion for cancer patients in the undeserving political story condition. The main treatment effect for Democrats is similarly statistically insignificant; however the sign is in the expected direction. Once again, Appel et al.'s findings regarding the relationship between need for affect and ideological disposition

seem relevant. Although the main treatment effect is statistically indistinguishable for both Democrats and Republicans, my findings provide further evidence in support of the claim that Republicans and Democrats may be react differently to political information that attempts to appeal to individuals' emotional impulses.

Table 15: Treatment Effect on Compassion by Party and Treatment Condition

	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Compassion	.57	.59	-.02 (.03)	.43	.65	.64	.01 (.02)	.61
N	280				310			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

Given these findings, I am unable to speak to the effect of presenting political arguments in the narrative format on positive emotions for both Republican and Democrat respondents. While the lack of statistically distinguishable effects in the analysis might undermine my account of the role of narrative affective responses for some, I believe my lack of finding are, at least in part, a result of the relatively high baseline levels of compassion among respondents in the first place. As Leone and Chirumbolo's work suggest, Republicans were less likely to express compassion for cancer patients. At the same time, however, Republicans' baseline levels of compassion toward cancer patients were relatively high (almost 60%) in both treatment conditions. Thus, it could be the case that when respondents generally feel compassion for the targets of policy proposals, subsequent attempts to evoke empathetic responses will not be fruitful and may even backfire in some cases.

5.3.3 Legalization of Medical Marijuana Attitudinal Measures

Next, I turn to my analysis of the effect of the undeserving political story on policy attitudes. To test my expectation that the undeserving political story will make Republicans more likely to express support for medical marijuana than Republicans in the deserving story condition, I performed regression analysis on three attitudinal outcome variables. The first measure asked respondents whether they supported or opposed legalizing marijuana for medical use. Responses ranged from 0 (strongly oppose) to 1 (strongly support). I estimated a model that regressed support for medical marijuana on the undeserving political story treatment variable. I controlled for political interest to adjust for differences in average attitudinal responses between more and less politically interested individuals.

As indicated in Table 16, the main treatment effect of the undeserving political story was -.06 (p=.06). Republicans in the undeserving story condition were, on average, six percent less likely to express support for the legalization of medical marijuana than Republicans in the deserving political condition. In other words, these findings suggest the effect of the undeserving political story was the opposite of what I expected. Rather than increasing support, the undeserving political story reduced support for medical marijuana. For Democrats, the main treatment effect is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Table 16: Treatment Effect of Undeserving Political Story on Support for Legalizing Medical Marijuana

	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Support for Legalization of Medical Marijuana	.58	.64	-.06 (.03)	.06	.63	.62	.01 (.02)	.76
N	280				309			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

I conducted a similar analysis on two more medical marijuana policy attitude measures. The first item asked respondents whether they believed marijuana does or does not have legitimate uses. Responses were recorded on a 0 (Does Not) to 1 (Does) scale. Once again, I controlled for respondents' level of political interest.

Table 17 presents the results of the analysis. As indicated in the table, the main treatment effect of the undeserving political story was -.11 (p=.01). Republicans in the undeserving political story condition were, on average, 11 percent less likely than Republicans in the deserving political story condition to believe that marijuana has legitimate uses. The main treatment effect of the undeserving political story was statistically indistinguishable from zero for Democrats.

Table 17: Treatment Effect of Undeserving Political Story on Beliefs about the Legitimacy of Medical Marijuana

	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p	Underserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Legitimate Use of Medical Marijuana	.81	.92	-.11 (.04)	.01	.88	.85	.03 (.03)	.33
N	280				309			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

The final attitudinal measure asked respondents "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for doctors to prescribe medical marijuana for their patients?" Responses were recorded on a 0 (Illegal) to 1 (Legal). I estimated a model that regressed respondents' views about the legality of doctors prescribing medical marijuana to their patients on the treatment variable. Once again, I controlled for respondents' level of political interest.

As indicated in Table 18, for Republicans the main treatment effect of the political story was -.10 (p=.02). In other words, Republicans in the undeserving political story condition were, on average, 10 percent less likely than Republicans in the deserving story condition to believe that doctors should be able to prescribe medical marijuana to patients. For Democrats, the main treatment effect is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Table 18: Treatment Effect of Undeserving Political Story on Beliefs about Prescribing Medical Marijuana

	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Doctors Allowed to Prescribe Medical Marijuana to Patients	.82	.92	-.10 (.04)	.02	.92	.87	.05 (.03)	.17
N	280				307			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

Taken together, these findings suggest political stories that feature characters that are described as not having made life choices that attributed to their current circumstances worked differently than I anticipated. Rather than increasing support for permissive policy positions, this version of the story seems to have dampened Republican support. It is important to note, however, that average levels of support for legalizing medical marijuana was relatively high in both story conditions for both Republicans and Democrats. Still, it is interesting to observe what appears to be a backlash effect among Republicans who were provided with information that John Smith's life choices did not contribute to his current medical diagnosis. It could be the case that this unexpected information evoked feelings of discomfort or uncertainty within Republicans that negatively affected subsequent attitudes.

5.3.4 Legalization of Medical Marijuana Behavioral Measures

Next, I turn to the effect of underserving political stories on behavioral measures. Recall I hypothesized that Republicans who are exposed to undeserving political stories will be more likely to report plans to engage in political activities related to the story subject matter than Republicans in the deserving political story condition. To test this hypothesis, I estimated a model that regressed the participation index on the political story treatment variable. These items included: giving money to an organization concerned with the legalization of medical marijuana, contacting a state representative, writing a Facebook status, signing a petition and writing a letter about legislative proposals to legalize medical marijuana. The participation index ranged from 0 (Very Unlikely) to 1 (Very Likely). I controlled for political interest in the model.

As indicated in Table 19, I find no support for my "narrative participation effect" hypothesis. Indeed, the main treatment effect of the undeserving political story was statistically indistinguishable for both Republicans and Democrats.

Table 19: Treatment Effect of Undeserving Political Story on Political Activity

	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Participation Index	.19	.21	-.02 (.02)	.37	.24	.24	.00 (.02)	.99
N	280				308			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

I included a less costly behavioral measure in my analysis to respond to the resource constraints that respondents might exhibit. More specifically, respondents were asked: "Would you like to learn more information about states currently considering the legalization of medical marijuana? Responses were recorded on a 0 (No) to 1 (Yes) scale. As indicated in Table 20, for both Republicans and Democrats the main treatment effect of the undeserving political story was also statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Table 20: Treatment Effect of Political Story on Information Seeking

	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p	Undeserving Political Story	Deserving Political Story	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Want More Information	.36	.41	-.05 (.06)	.38	.54	.50	.04 (.06)	.46
N	279				309			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

5.3.5 Government Blame Attributions

Next, I turn to my analysis of the effect of political stories on government blame attributions. Recall that Iyengar's work suggests that political stories should make individuals less likely to attribute blame to the government for social problems. Respondents in the study were asked "Earlier in the survey you read about medical patients' fear of being prosecuted for using medical marijuana. Who or what do you think is to blame for medical patients' current legal predicament?" This question was open response. I created a new variable that took on the value of 1 if respondents wrote that federal government, state government or lawmakers were to blame; the variable took on

the value of 0 for all other written responses. I estimated a model that regressed blame attribution variable on the treatment variable. The treatment variable took on the value one if the respondent was randomly assigned to one of the two political story conditions and zero if the respondent was randomly assigned to the thematic political frame condition.

As indicated in Table 21, Republicans in the story condition were, on average, 14 percent more likely than Republicans in the political frame condition to blame the government for the legal predicament facing cancer patients who want to use medical marijuana (p=.01). This effect was statistically indistinguishable for Democrats. These findings suggest that Stone's account of the effect of stories in the political arena more accurately depicts the effect of presenting political arguments in the narrative format.

Table 21: Government Blame Attributions by Party and Treatment Condition

	Political Story	Thematic Political Frame	Effect	p	Political Story	Thematic Political Frame	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Government Blame Attributions	.53	.39	.14 (.05)	.01	.53	.48	.05 (.05)	.38
N	437				440			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

5.3.6 Cognitive Engagement Measures

Finally, I explored the effect of presenting political information in the narrative format on cognitive engagement. I included two measures to estimate this effect. The first

cognitive engagement measure captured the amount of time that respondents spent reading the experimental stimulus. I estimated a model that regressed the treatment reading time variable on the treatment variable. The treatment variable took on the value one if the respondent was randomly assigned to one of the two political story conditions and zero if the respondent was randomly assigned to the thematic political frame condition.

Table 22 presents the findings of this analysis. As indicated in this table, Republicans in the political story condition spent, on average, 14 more seconds reading the experimental stimuli than Republicans in the political frame condition (p=.01).[2] This effect was statistically indistinguishable for Democrats. In other words, similar to my focus group observations, it appears that political stories may encourage individuals to devote cognitive resources to processing political information.

Table 22: Mean Treatment Reading Time by Party and Treatment Condition

	Political Story	Thematic Political Frame	Effect	p	Political Story	Thematic Political Frame	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Treatment Reading Time	58.38	43.97	14.41 (6.03)	.02	49.93	51.62	1.70 (5.95)	.77
N	439				443			

Standard errors reported in parentheses.

[2] Given the positive skew of the treatment time variable, I created a new variable that takes the log value of respondents' reading time. I obtained similar findings substantive findings. I report the treatment time variable here with no transformation for ease of interpretation.

The second cognitive engagement measure captured the number of written reactions to drug testing proposals. Respondents were asked "What is the (first/second/third) thing that comes to mind when you think about legislative proposals to legalize medical marijuana?" I created a new variable that captured the number of written responses that respondents provided. I recoded the variable into a proportion. I estimated a model that regressed the written responses proportion variable on the treatment variable. The treatment variable took on the value one if the respondent was randomly assigned to one of the two political story conditions and zero if the respondent was randomly assigned to the thematic political frame condition.

Table 23 presents the results of this analysis. As indicated in this table, Republicans in the political story condition were, on average, nine percent more likely than Republicans in the political frame condition to provide three reactions to drug testing proposals (p=.004). This effect was statistically indistinguishable for Democrats. The findings provide further support for my focus group observation that political stories seems to make individuals, whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose a policy, more willing to devote cognitive resources to discussing these issues.

Table 23: Written Policy Reactions by Party and Treatment Condition

	Political Story	Thematic Political Frame	Effect	p	Political Story	Thematic Political Frame	Effect	p
	Republicans				Democrats			
Number of Written Policy Reactions	.65	.58	.07 (.02)	.004	.63	.62	.01	.84
N	439				443			

5.3.7 The Effect of Storytelling on Low Trust Republicans who are Politically Interested

Up to this point, I have estimated the main treatment effect of the undeserving political story on compassion toward cancer patients, medical marijuana policy attitudes and behavior. However, my primary interest in examining the effect of political storytelling was to gauge whether presenting arguments in the narrative format would make it easier to establish areas of political commonality between Democrats and Republicans. Given this interest, I decided to replicate the analysis for low trust Republicans who are politically interested. One hundred and twenty-two Republicans in my sample fell into this category. I decided to conduct analysis on this group in light of Hetherington and Rudolph's work suggesting that individuals who distrust the government are an obstacle to overcoming partisan bickering because these individuals are less likely to make "ideological sacrifices." (2015, 4) From this perspective, low trust and high political interest Republicans are an informative test case because these individuals are likely to be keenly aware of partisan differences in support for legalizing medical marijuana.

To speak to the potential for political stories to influence low trust and high interest Republicans, I estimated a model that regressed the various study measures on the political story treatment variable. The political story treatment variable took on the value one when a respondent was randomly assigned to one of the story conditions. It took on the value zero when a respondent was randomly assigned to the thematic political frame condition.

Table 24 presents the results of this analysis. As indicated in the table, political stories seem to have a unique effect on this Republican subgroup. Indeed, lower trust Republicans who are politically interested in the political story condition were, on average, ten percent more likely than their counterparts in the thematic political frame condition to express support for legalizing medical marijuana (p=.12). They are also more likely to express to believe that marijuana has legitimate medical uses. More specifically, lower trust Republicans who are politically interested in the political story condition were, on average, 17 percent more likely than their counterparts in the thematic political frame condition to believe that marijuana has legitimate medical uses (p=.05). Finally, lower trust Republicans who are politically interested in the political story condition were, on average, 17 percent more likely than their counterparts in the thematic political frame condition to express support for doctors prescribing medical marijuana to patients (p=.06).

The political story also appears to influence government blame attributions. Lower trust Republicans who are politically interested in the political story condition were, on average, 30 percent more likely than their counterparts in the thematic political frame condition to blame the government for the current legal predicament facing cancer patients who want to use medical marijuana (p=.003). Finally, lower trust Republicans who are politically interested were more likely to spend time reading the treatment in the political story condition. More specifically, those in the political story condition spent, on average, 25.47 more seconds reading the stimulus than their counterparts in the thematic political frame condition (p=.06).

Table 24: Low Trust and High Political Interest Republicans' Beliefs and Behavior

	Thematic Political Frame	Political Story	Difference
Narrative Engagement			
Story Involvement Index	.21	.22	.01 (.01)
Story Impact Index	.27	.25	-.02 (.02)
Emotional Reactions			
Compassion	.53	.56	.03 (.05)
Policy Attitudes			
Support for Legalization of Medical Marijuana	.46	.56	.10 (.06)
Legitimate Use of Medical Marijuana	**.64**	**.81**	**.17** **(.02)**
Doctors Allowed to Prescribe Medical Marijuana to Patients	**.58**	**.75**	**.17** **(.09)**
Behavioral Measures			
Participation Index	.21	.24	.03 (.03)
More Information	.50	.49	-.01 (.10)
Government Blame Attributions	**.28**	**.58**	**.30** **(.10)**
Cognitive Engagement Measures			
Treatment Reading Time	**39.48**	**64.95**	**25.47** **(13.43)**
Number of Written Policy Reactions	.68	.70	.02 (.03)

*Standard errors reported in parentheses. Bolded coefficients significant at conventional levels, p<.10

5.4 Discussion

Taken together, the findings of my study suggest that political stories do not make individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose policy measures more likely to view feel more mentally involved with the story subject matter or perceive these issues to be relevant to their lives. However, the details of story characters behavioral choices do seem to influence subsequent attitude formation. Interestingly, however, this effect works differently than I initially anticipated. I expected that political stories that provided a cue suggesting a story character likely had no role in bringing about their current circumstance would make individuals more supportive of permissive policy positions. Contrary to my expectations, it appears that there may be a backlash effect of providing this additional information. Indeed, I found that Republicans in the undeserving political story condition were less likely to support legalizing medical marijuana. They were also less to believe there are legitimate uses of marijuana and that doctors should be allowed to prescribe marijuana to their patients. Finally, it appears that political stories have no effect on individuals' intent to engage in political activities related to the story subject matter.

Interestingly, however, political stories do seem to affect government blame attributions and cognitive engagement among individuals whose partisan identity predisposes them to oppose a policy measure. Indeed, I found that these individuals were more likely to blame the government for the legal predicament facing cancer patients after being exposed to a political story. As it relates to cognitive engagement, survey respondents tended to spend more time reading the stimuli when in a story condition.

They were also more likely to provide written responses in a story condition. These findings suggest that while political stories may incur a backlash effect based on the details presented in these stories, and clearly do not provide a call to action, they do appear to shape individuals' perceptions of the government's responsibility for social problems. Moreover, these stories seem to motivate individuals to devote cognitive resources to engaging in policy debates.

From this perspective, my work suggests that narrative argumentation is consequential to the world of politics. Indeed, Westen and Lupia argue that the biggest obstacle to engaging individuals in the political process is grabbing their attention. From this perspective, my findings suggest that political storytelling may be an effective tool for surmounting this challenge. Moreover, the sizeable boosts in low trust Republicans' positive perceptions of medical marijuana suggest that storytelling may be an effective tool in yet another political challenge: establishing political commonality among individuals from opposite sides of the aisle.

Up to this point I have argued that my findings fail to provide support for communication and psychology scholars' theoretical account of the mechanisms that drive narrative persuasion.. While this may certainly be the case, it is important to acknowledge that my empirical tests of narrative and non-narrative information on beliefs and behavior diverged from this work in how it operationalized narrative and non-narrative arguments. In political science, researchers who employ experimental methods stress the importance of parity in experimental stimuli when conducting empirical tests. As a result, the stimuli used in these studies tend to be the same across conditions except for the feature being manipulated in the study. Within my project, these disciplinary

norms meant that I did not actually compare political stories and political frames as they emerged in my content analysis. Rather, I tested the effect of adding anecdotal information to a thematic political frame.

The approach adopted by the communications scholars I cite in my work is different. While these scholars acknowledge the importance of using stimuli that are as similar as possible in their empirical work, they also encourage scholars to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations that allow them to imitate how information is presented to members of society in the real world. For instance, Murphy et al. (2013) note the difficulty "in producing or selecting appropriately engaging narrative and non-narrative messages for comparison within studies." (Murphy et al. 2013, 3) To overcome this challenge, the authors brought together communication scholars, filmmakers and medical experts to produce two original films that they used to investigate whether health information presented in the narrative format increased health-related knowledge, attitudes and behavioral intentions. The authors argue that this approach allowed them to create stimuli that mimicked the real-world production choices of filmmakers who create these ads for public health agencies and organizations.

Oliver et al. made a similar choice in their study of the effect of narrative news format on empathy for stigmatized groups. The authors explain that in an effort to "increase the authenticity of the stories" they worked with a former professional journalist to create the news stories that were used in their experimental study (2012, 209). While the authors made an effort to "equate the stories' general topic" the narrative and non-narrative versions ultimately differed in their presentation of the policy issue.

Still, the authors took care to ensure the length of stories was similar as was the story location and source.

In future iterations of this project, I think it is more appropriate to adopt the approach of communications scholars. While it is certainly important to minimize the differences across conditions so that one can speak confidently about the elements of stimuli that elicit changes in attitudes and behavior, I believe that adhering too strictly to this rule of thumb may be counterproductive. More specifically, it is unhelpful to adhere to these norms when they preclude scholars' ability to measure the effect of constructs as they are encountered by the electorate in the real world. Indeed, in this scenario, I believe it is more important to create stimuli that accurately reflect the constructs as the electorate encounters them in the real world than minimize differences. However, in taking this approach, it should always be the expectation that scholars are transparent in these decisions and justify them in the analysis.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ABOUT POLITIAL STORYTELLING AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

In this dissertation I explored the effect of political storytelling on political beliefs and behavior, government blame attributions and information processing. I argued there are three conditions in which we should expect political storytelling to be most effective. Storytelling should be most effective when (1) there are non-entrenched partisan differences on policy issues; (2) the policy issues are of personal relevance to audience members; and (3) when the cause of the underlying social problem is relatively straightforward. Moreover, I argued political stories that present a stereotype-inconsistent portrayal of the targets of policy proposals that are positive should provide cues about the deservingness of these individuals. These perceptions, in turn, should provoke affective responses that influence subsequent beliefs and behavior.

My focus group work provided some support for my theoretical expectations. Indeed, I found that participants noticed cues that conveyed information about the targets of policy proposals' deservingness. These participants even vocalized how these cues influenced their thinking within the focus group meeting. The findings of my survey experiment provided unexpected findings regarding the effect of cues about the behavioral choices of story characters. Indeed, Republicans seemed to be *less* supportive of medical marijuana after reading a story about a cancer patient whose life choices likely did not lead to their medical diagnosis.

Unfortunately, these data do not allow me to unpack why this effect emerged in the analysis. It could be that Republicans in the sample were themselves smokers and

were therefore more likely to express support in the deserving story condition. It could also be the case that Republicans had family members who were smokers and died from lung cancer and that this exposure led to stronger responses to the story character that was described as a long time drinker and smoker. Unfortunately, I cannot speak to this directly because I did not ask respondents about their personal and family experience with cancer. In subsequent iterations of the project, I plan to include such measures.

Nevertheless, my findings suggest that political stories increased the likelihood that individuals attributed blame to the government for policy problems. My findings push back against Iyengar's conclusion that presenting individuals with anecdotal evidence leads them to hold individuals responsible for social problems rather than government officials. My study suggests that this need not be the case. Instead, my findings suggest that this information simply needs to be combined with broader political arguments that provide context to the situation that individuals face.

Finally, my finding that political stories seem to encourage individuals to devote more cognitive resources to processing political arguments and discussing their reactions to this information suggests that political storytelling may be a useful tool for motivating citizens who typically shy away from the political process. Indeed, if survey respondents who were not forced to provide written reactions to policy debates were more likely to choose to do so after reading a political story, it seems likely that political storytelling would also make policy debates more engaging and accessible to the average citizen in the real world of politics.

These findings are of great relevance to politics in light of work that suggests that one of the greatest challenges to a more participatory democracy is an inability to capture the electorate's attention. Indeed, it appears that political storytelling can capture the attention of the electorate, and when these stories do, they increase the likelihood that individuals will blame the government for social and policy problems and look to these institutions for solutions.

Some readers might express trepidation about using political storytelling to engage individuals in policy debates. These critics might suggest that a more fruitful theoretical account would be instructive about how to motivate citizens to engage with political arguments that are more accurately depicts the policy problem. While a well-informed citizenry who are willing to marshal different types of evidence is certainly attractive, it is also idealistic. Indeed, the existing literature suggests that despite technological advances that have made information more accessible to the average citizen than in any other period in history, only those who are interested in politics take advantage of this access (Prior 2005b). The political reality is that most citizens are uninterested in politics and, even when given access to information, behave as cognitive misers who rely on partisan cues or their broader affective responses when engaging in political decision-making.

From this vantage point, political storytelling offers a pragmatic alternative. Storytelling is a widely shared cultural practice for conveying lessons that most citizens become acquainted with from their early childhood. Because storytelling is a common cultural practice, employing this rhetorical strategy has the potential to make politics more appealing (and accessible) to a wider array of citizens. Thus, political storytelling

may help minimize the negative implications of the growing knowledge gap between citizens who are interested in politics and those who are not.

At the same time, critics might argue that political storytelling does not address knowledge gaps because the characters featured in these stories may not be accurate representations of the targets of policy proposals. Indeed, I have argued that the characters and experiences depicted in these stories are political. Political actors can choose to share stories about characters that reiterate existing stereotypes rather than challenge them. This criticism is well founded; however given the potential for political storytelling to serve positive ends, I believe a more beneficial use of scholarly resources would be to develop an ethics of political storytelling for which political leaders can be held accountable.

There are at least two extensions of this project that I plan to explore in future work. In future iterations of this project, I plan to adopt a quasi-experimental case study approach may be a more appropriate analytical approach to test my concept of political storytelling. In this approach, I plan to identify two states that have introduced medical marijuana legislative proposals who have similar institutional arrangements and demographic characteristics but different legislative outcomes. I plan to use these case studies to dig deeper into the evolution of political stories and how these stories interact with public opinion over time. Indeed, by using the case study approach, I can hold features of the political context (i.e. institutional arrangements and political campaigns) constant and use elite interviews to dig deeper into thought processes behind the use of political storytelling in the first place. Moreover, by using state case studies I can explore

whether the electoral context influences the emergence, and salience, of political storytelling.

Finally, I plan to explore the moderating effects of characters' demographic characteristics on political beliefs and behavior. In the current study, the survey experiment featured John Smith, a story character whose name was purposefully race-neutral. But how might the effects of political storytelling change if John were instead Juan or Jamal? Moreover, what if the story featured Joan instead of John? Existing work on implicit bias suggest these choices are highly consequential to subsequent decision making (Mendelberg 2001). Because political stories often feature the real anecdotal experiences of actual members of society, an important next step is to understand how these attributes influence the power of political storytelling.

Appendix A: Drug Testing for Welfare Benefits Political Arguments Uncovered in Content Analysis of 2009-2014 News Coverage

N= 26 Drug Testing Political Argument Themes

Political Frame	Description	Political Frame Segments Coded	Political Story Segments Coded
Abusing Scarce Resources	Suggests that people on public assistance are misusing the money they are receiving and implementing drug testing measures has the potential to rein in this abuse.	14	9
Adjust for Inflation	Argues that public assistance benefits have not been adjusted for inflation since 1985 which draws attention to the need to revise our thinking about social welfare programs.	2	0
Easy Targets	Argues that drug-testing measures unfairly target one of society's most vulnerable groups: the poor.	6	1
Employment Trends	Argues that employers have faced great difficulty trying to identify and recruit employees who are sober, drug free and willing to gain the skills needed to gain full employment	2	3
Expect Stipulations	Argues that welfare recipients should expect stipulations on money they receive from the state	6	0
Expensive Tab	Argues that requiring drug testing will require tremendous investment of taxpayers' money, making it a very costly monitoring program	14	3
Follow the Wisdom	Argues that legislators should formulate drug testing legislation in light of what has been learned in other states who have attempted similar legislation	6	4
Fostering Responsibility	Argues that implementing drug testing requirements fosters a greater sense of personal responsibility among welfare recipients.	13	2
Misguided Allocation of Resources	Argues that political leaders seem reluctant to stem welfare assistance abuse while also seemingly being unwilling to address other important issues of national importance including national security	3	0

More Important Barriers	Argues that there are more important barriers/challenges that welfare applicants face that should be addressed by legislators	3	0
Nuts and Bolts of Testing	Argues that current drug tests are not exhaustive enough and should be enhanced to cover a more complete range of drugs that tend to be abused in society. Also raises questions about the length of time that individuals will test positive for drugs after use.	2	0
Others Have to Submit	Argues that many ordinary citizens who seek employment have to submit to drug testing, so it is not unreasonable to require this of those who collect public assistance	8	0
Prepared for Work	Argues that implementing mandatory drug tests ensures that welfare recipients successfully transition from receiving cash assistance to gainful employment.	4	0
Protecting Kids	Argues that implementing drug testing protects children by ensuring that state money is not fueling drug addiction—rather it is ensuring that public assistance is actually being spent on food and clothing.	12	6
Protection of Rights	Argues that requiring citizens to submit to drug testing is an invasion of individuals' constitutional rights, particularly their right to privacy. This is particularly problematic in the case of drug testing because the results of drug tests could possibly be available to other government agencies including law enforcement.	23	21
Reality of Drug Use	Argues that, in reality, there is not a higher rate of drug use among public assistance applicants than among the general population.	26	27
Really saving?	Argues that the costs associated with administering a drug testing program will likely offset any savings that would follow from taking away benefits from recipients who test positive for drugs.	6	7
Reducing Welfare Rolls	Argues that implementing drug testing will reduce the number of welfare recipients	5	3
Rehabilitation not Alienation	Argues that drug testing measures are meant to encourage people to seek out treatment, not alienate them by denying vital resources	13	1
Republican Social Agenda	Argues that since taking over state government, Republicans are on a mission to steamroll a conservative agenda.	10	1

Sins of the Father	Argues that it is wrong to withhold welfare benefits from an entire household because one family member tests positive	7	2
Stigmatizing the Poor	Argues that drug testing stigmatizes those who may be forced to apply for benefits due to life circumstances. And in doing so, deters law-abiding citizens from applying for help and deprives individuals from monies that are set aside to help meet citizens' nutritional needs.	39	18
Subsidizing Bad Behavior	Argues that taxpayers should be forced to subsidize the lifestyle of those who abuse drugs and more generally refuse to behave as responsible citizens	20	2
Test Elected Officials Too!	Argues that it is only fair that elected representatives (state and/or federal) should be held to the same standard that they impose on the poor; in this case, that they should submit to drug tests as well.	11	4
Test Everyone	Argues that allowing drug testing of welfare recipients opens the door to requiring any and all individuals who receive government dollars including college students, veterans and contractors to be tested.	12	1
Trends in Welfare Use	Argues that the number of individuals on welfare has actually decreased over time	9	5
TOTAL		**276**	**120**

Appendix B: Legalization of Medical Marijuana Political Arguments Uncovered in Content Analysis of 1994-2014 News Coverage

Label	Description	Political Frame Segments Coded	Political Story Segments Coded
Business Related			
Banking Needs	Examines the difficulty that dispensary owners face in running their primarily cash-based business because banks, fearing federal prosecution, refuse to furnish banking services. These challenges include paying employees in cash and a constant fear of being robbed.	35	23
Criminal Element	Makes reference to the criminal behavior thought to be associated with operating medical marijuana businesses	5	17
Distribution Issue	Raises arguments about who possesses the legal right to grow and distribute medical marijuana	51	200
Good Governance	Examines the challenges that surround the implementation of mechanisms that ensure that businesses are adhering to state laws regarding medical marijuana	48	135
Growing Industry	Makes reference to claims that legalizing medical marijuana may lead to the emergence of a new business industry	74	241
Operating Dangers	Makes reference to the dangers associated with running a medical marijuana related business including fear of robbery, murder by drug cartels or drug addicts.	16	32
Regulatory Measures	Argues that regulatory measures are needed to ensure that individuals are well informed of proper dosages and the content of medical marijuana products.	34	32
Community Related			
Effect on Child Welfare	Raises arguments about the effect of legalization of medical marijuana on children whose parents use it	11	7
Ethical Attributes	Makes reference to the questionable character of those who either use medical marijuana or are involved with the industry	19	48
Greater Education is Needed	Raises arguments about the importance of sharing factual information about marijuana with the public	3	1
Legalization is a Gateway	Raises arguments about the legalization of medical marijuana leading to the legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes	76	42
Property Values	Argues that opening marijuana dispensaries will lower neighborhood property values	1	1
Public Safety	Makes reference to the implication of legalizing medical marijuana on public safety including operating motor	26	24

	vehicles and working in certain job sectors		
Raising Revenue	Makes reference to the potential revenue that could be raised by taxing medical marijuana patients	25	38
Crime Related			
Bigger Problems	Makes reference to other social problems that are arguably more important than prosecuting medical marijuana users	3	0
Black Markets	Argues that legalizing medical marijuana may invite black markets	28	17
Enforcing Responsibility	Examines the challenges with respect to enforcing responsible use of medical marijuana including detecting when the drug is being abused and identifying individuals with forged prescriptions	1	1
Exposing Kids to Drugs	Argues that legalizing medical marijuana will expose children to drug and condone drug use	111	63
Fear of Prosecution	Makes reference to medical marijuana cardholders' fear of prosecution because of federal laws regarding marijuana	204	260
Increased Crime	Argues that legalizing medical marijuana may lead to a surge in violent crime	15	31
Neighboring States	Argues legalizing marijuana in a state will negatively affect neighboring states as individuals transport their purchases across state lines.	1	1
Racial Profiling	Argues legalizing medical marijuana may help address disproportionate rates of drug related arrests and incarceration among people of color	8	9
Rates of Drug Abuse	Argues that legalizing medical marijuana may open the door to widespread drug use	69	51
Waste of Resources	Makes reference to claims that enforcing marijuana laws is a waste of resources	34	10
Government Related			
Chaos in Implementation	Makes reference to the regulatory chaos that followed the legalization of medical marijuana	83	112
Constitutional Right	Makes reference to claims that citizens have a constitutional right to voice their opinion and their vision of what the laws in their city should be	12	41
Employer Drug Testing	Makes reference to complications that arise when private employers implement drug testing procedures	35	33
Federalism	Makes reference to the disjuncture between state and federal law regarding marijuana as a controlled substance	260	243
Learn From Other States	Argues that state leaders can learn from states that have implemented medical marijuana initiatives	33	39
Legalization Will Lead to Recreational Use	Makes claims about the legalization of medical marijuana paving the way for legalizing the recreational use of marijuana	50	29

Need for Regulation	Argues medical marijuana should be regulated by a federal agency such as the Food and Drug Administration	25	8
War on Drugs	Makes reference to the drug war that has taken place in the United States over the last several decades. Often draws on military or war symbols to describe the current debate surrounding legalization of medical marijuana	68	25
Health Related			
Another Controlled Substance	Argues that medical marijuana is no different than other controlled substances that are currently dispensed by pharmacists	0	2
Dispensaries are Safer	Argues that buying marijuana from dispensaries is safer than buying it from drug dealers	14	16
Doctor Patient Relationship	Argues the attempts to block legalization infringe on doctor-patient relationship rights	40	13
Effective Alternatives Already Exist	Makes claims about alternatives to medical marijuana that already exist as treatments to medical diagnoses	60	43
Harmful Effects	Makes reference to the potentially harmful effects of marijuana	94	13
Need for Research	Argues that more research is needed to establish the medical benefits of marijuana use.	140	55
Pain Relief	Argues that medical marijuana has the potential to alleviate pain associated with medical diagnoses	255	333
Patient Rights	Makes reference to patients' right to choose their preferred course of medical treatment	11	14
Protecting Children	Makes reference to the potential of medical marijuana to help severely ill children	13	30
Partisanship			
Republican Opposition	Discusses Republicans' objections to the legalization of medical marijuana over time	29	40
TOTAL		**2120**	**2373**

Appendix C: Focus Group Recruitment Flyer

SEEKING VANDERBILT EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY TAKING PLACE ON CAMPUS THIS SUMMER

Who can participate?

Any Vanderbilt employee who is at least 18 years old and identifies as either a Republican, Democrat, or Political Independent. No prior knowledge or interest in politics is required to participate. All are welcome.

What will you do?

You will meet on campus for a 90 minute focus group with 6-8 other individuals. Before and after the meeting , you will fill out a short questionnaire. During the focus group, you will share your opinions about public policy and the government.

How will you be compensated?

You will receive a $40 Visa cash card at the end of the 90 minute meeting.

If interested, please contact Brielle Harbin (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science) Brielle.harbin@vanderbilt.edu or call (615) 768-9652

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Appendix D: Sample Focus Group Meeting Stimulus

USA TODAY
A GANNETT COMPANY

States Debate Drug Testing Measures for Welfare Benefits

Doug Young, USA Today – February 11, 2015

Several states are currently considering legislation that would implement drug testing for those seeking public assistance. At least thirteen states have already done so. The nature of this legislation varies across states. In some states, program administrators must have reason to believe that an applicant is engaging in illegal drug activity or has a substance abuse problem to require an applicant to submit to drug testing. In other states, applicants must fill out a questionnaire that probes about past substance abuse.

In 2012, Tennessee passed legislation that required the TN Department of Human Services (DHS) to develop a plan to implement a program of suspicion-based drug testing for applicants to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The bill mandated that DHS work with experts to identify appropriate screening tools, assessments, and provide implementation recommendations.

Sixteen other states, including South Carolina, West Virginia, and Montana, are currently considering similar legislation.

Legislators in these states are currently debating whether such legislation infringes on individuals' constitutional rights. Opponents of the legislation argue drug testing violates individuals' right to privacy and that states are overstepping their authority by requiring citizens to submit to testing. These opponents often reference stories like that of Luis Lebron. A Navy veteran and full-time student, Lebron cares for his disabled mother and raises a young child as a single father. In 2011, he filed for assistance in Florida. During the application process, Lebron refused testing because he believed it was unfair to force him to submit when nothing in his past suggested he was at risk for drug abuse. Opponents agree the state overstepped its authority in the case. They also argue that there is not a clear enough plan to protect those who test positive from criminal prosecution.

Supporters of the legislation believe the potential to identify troubled individuals who are putting others at risk, including their children and other members of the community, is worth potentially infringing on individuals' right to privacy. Supporters often point to stories like that of Lazhanae Johnson— a single mother, and former inmate, who gave birth to nine children and soon after turned them over to the State. Several of Johnson's children faced great difficulties as wards of the State. One died as a toddler and two others went missing. For testing supporters, identifying Johnson, and helping her get treatment, could have saved her children. For them, the possibility of protecting innocent bystanders far outweighs concerns about protecting individuals' right to privacy.

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Legislators are currently debating whether welfare recipients are more likely than members of the general population to abuse drugs. Those who oppose drug-testing legislation argue that those receiving public assistance are not more likely to abuse drugs than members of the general population. These opponents frequently point to findings from states that implemented drug-testing measures and produced few positive drug screenings. For instance, after passing drug-testing measures in 2011, Florida state data revealed that only 108 out of 4,086 people who were tested—or 2.6 percent—were found to have been using narcotics. They also point to the state of Michigan which abandoned drug-testing after screening 238 welfare applicants turned up only 21 individuals who tested positive for drugs—all but three for smoking marijuana.

Supporters of the legislation argue that these statistics likely underestimate drug use among welfare recipients because those who know they would fail opt out of the application process altogether. Drug testing advocates also argue that drug abuse devastates American families including the lives of innocent children. For example, they draw on the experiences of people like foster mother Barbara Harris and her husband who took in an eight month year old baby born to a crack addicted mother as well as three of his crack addicted siblings over several years. For advocates of the legislation, drug testing is an opportunity to protect innocent children from the vulnerable position of living with drug addicted parents who care more about scoring drugs than providing food and shelter.

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Legislators in these states are currently debating whether such legislation unfairly stigmatizes welfare recipients. Opponents of the legislation argue that drug testing measures perpetuate the stereotype that those in need of assistance are not hardworking and are more likely to engage in criminal activity. These opponents offer stories like that of Kristen and Joe Parente who were forced to turn to the government for help. Joe, a fourth-generation pipe fitter, sustained a back injury that left him unable to work. Soon after, the American economy imploded during the Great Recession. To keep their family afloat, Kristen took on a part-time waitressing job but was laid off. These circumstances forced the family to apply for TANF. Reflecting on their welfare experience, the Parentes recall how “humiliating” it felt to be treated “like bums.”

Supporters of the legislation argue that drug testing measures provide social workers with an opportunity to intervene and help families affected by drug use get the help they need. Advocates of the legislation argue that drug testing forces mothers and fathers to take seriously their role as parents and abandon unhealthy habits. Supporters of drug testing offer stories like that of Estefana Armas, a 30-year-old mother of three who struggled with debilitating depression and was forced to turn to welfare. Drug testing advocates believe the stipulations placed on Estefana’s assistance encouraged her to seek out support groups, earn a GED, and eventually enroll in community college. For them, the knowledge that she could be cut off from benefits motivated Estefana to be proactive about changing her life circumstance.

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