Disentangling the Welfare Puzzle: Framing Effects on Public Attitudes toward SNAP

Kunpeng Wang, Ph.D.
The University of Alabama

Abstract

Different media outlets can frame the same news story in different ways. This article examines how media framing affects public attitudes toward one of the largest public assistance programs in the U.S.- the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). I conduct a survey experiment to test how the perceived race or ethnicity of a SNAP recipient and the tone of the news influence survey respondents' opinions. The results of the study show that the tone of a news story does not exert any influence on public attitudes toward SNAP, but the ethnicity of a SNAP recipient affects public attitudes toward SNAP. The implication of the findings is that racial prejudice still affects how the public think about a welfare program and its recipients. It exerts an influence on a public policy's development and the policy-making process.

Keywords: SNAP, Framing, Public Attitudes, Public Policy

1.Introduction

Various media outlets provide us with news and information we digest, filter and absorb. It is well-known that different media outlets can frame the same news story in different ways. A single media outlet can even change its tone toward an issue over time. A large literature in different fields has found that what individuals watch, hear or read from the media may affect how they think about an issue. However, can media framing affect public attitudes toward Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)? If that is the case, how does media framing affect public opinion? Specifically, how do positive frames and negative frames exert influence on public attitudes toward SNAP? When the frames are racialized, what effect does framing have on SNAP support? These research questions are very important because the answers to these questions would help us understand public attitudes toward SNAP over time and better understand what really matters regarding SNAP expansion.

To better understand contemporary attitudes toward SNAP, I conducted a survey experiment to test how the tone of a news story and the race and ethnicity of the SNAP recipients implied in the news story influence respondents' opinions toward SNAP. The design of the survey experiment is 2 × 3. Survey respondents were randomly assigned to one of six different versions of a news story about SNAP, resulting in six experimental groups based on the different combinations of story tone, target race and ethnicity. Then, the respondents were asked a series of questions after reading a news story. The results from the multiple linear regression and ordered logit regression reveal that the tone of a news story does not affect public attitudes toward SNAP. However, I find that survey respondents are more likely to support decreasing government spending when the perceived ethnicity of a SNAP recipient in a news story is Latina compared to those who read a news story about a White SNAP recipient.

2. Media Framing and Public Opinion

Many scholars have discussed media framing and public opinion in different policy areas, which can offer some guidance concerning how framing effects work. Abrajano et al. (2017) examined framing effects by assessing the relationship between the news coverage of immigration issues and aggregate partisanship. They find that framing can change political predispositions and affect the balance of power in terms of partisanship. Iyengar and Simon (1993) document media effects of coverage of the Gulf crisis and find that people who were more frequently exposed to TV news showed greater support for a military response to the Gulf crisis. They also emphasize that the primary source for journalists was the government. Iyengar and Simon are not alone in regard to emphasizing the media's reliance on governmental sources. Waymer (2009) believes that the media are agents of socialization that shape and affect individuals' identities. Journalists and reporters who rely on official sources frame the events surrounding controversial issues. Media outlets serve as our tools to provide information regarding events outside of our view. Thus, we view the world through the lens of media.

The research on media framing effects also extends to the areas of wrongful convictions, crime, and Social Security. Norris and Mullinix (2019) examine the effects of discourse about wrongful convictions on public opinion. They conclude that the framing effects on public attitudes toward the justice system depend on how the issue is framed. Iyengar (1996) examined the framing effects of TV news on how viewers attribute responsibilities to political issues. He believes that individuals' perceptions of responsibility are influenced by news frames. TV news about particular examples of poverty can encourage the public to blame rather than sympathize with the victim.

Besides exposure to the media, whether people have firm beliefs on issues may also shape framing effects. Chong and Druckman (2007) believe that frames influence individuals' attitudes as well as their behaviors. However, people who have firm beliefs on certain issues may not be susceptible to media framing. Nelson et al. (1997) argue that framing is different from persuading people to alter a belief. Framing influences the balance of thoughts when people consider political issues. Framing effects are more significant among people who are familiar with the content of issues. Media framing activates individuals' existing beliefs as well as cognitions, but it does not bring new elements to their beliefs. Framing effects are often connected with citizen incompetence. In other words, people develop their attitudes toward policies based on arbitrary information they receive from elites including the media and politicians. However, Druckman (2001) argues against the finding that citizens' preferences are often manipulated by frames elites use. He believes that individuals deliberate the contents implied by frames and compare them with their own predispositions in a competent manner. In addition, framing effects are quite complicated because they do not always work.

3. Welfare Framing and Racial Attitudes

There is no consensus of opinion on framing effects in various policy areas. What about welfare framing? How does media framing affect public attitudes toward welfare programs? More than twenty years ago, Gilens (1999) used the term "welfare" to refer to means-tested cash benefit programs which are designed to help able-bodied and working-aged people. Gilens reported that about 60% to 70% of Americans thought too much had been spent for welfare. However, most Americans thought the government had the responsibility to offer benefits to the poor. More than 70% of Americans believed that the government had spent too little on fighting poverty and that spending needed to be increased. Therefore, there is a conflict between this broad public support for building and maintaining the welfare state and unfavorable attitudes toward programs referred to as "welfare."

Research on framing and welfare programs during the mid-1990s was conducted by Schneider and Jacoby (2005). Their research demonstrates that the shift in public attitudes toward welfare follows changes in news coverage. Specifically, they argue that elite discourse leads to changes in public opinion and that the effect of elite discourse varies according to individuals' attentiveness to politics. The opinions of uninformed citizens derive from their party identifications and their evaluations of welfare recipients, while the opinions of highly-informed people follow the pattern of elite political discourse. Epp and Jennings (2021) found that the news media is more likely to prime the personal characteristics of the poor rather than circumstantial difficulties and social causes of poverty during periods of rising inequality. Such a shift in media coverage can predict a decline in public support for welfare programs. Their experiment showed that even lower-income respondents who were exposed to news coverage about welfare recipients' personal characteristics resulting in failure were less likely to show support for welfare programs.

Racial cues in media framing may also affect public attitudes toward welfare programs, regardless of whether these racial cues are overtly expressed or covertly hidden in media frames. As many scholars have argued, racism still exists in contemporary society. Kinder and Sears (1981) believe that symbolic racism, also known as sociocultural prejudice, focuses on abstract and moralistic resentments toward Blacks, and is derived from preadult socialization. Specifically, they demonstrate that symbolic racism greatly influences Whites' voting behavior against a Black candidate in the Los Angeles mayoral race. Tarman and Sears (2005) argue that symbolic racism influence Whites' policy preferences no matter which measure of symbolic racism is used. Symbolic racism is the strongest explanation for Whites' opposition to policies involving race.

The theory of symbolic racism was challenged by Sniderman et al.'s (1991) experimental results. They believe that the new racism is largely an expression of conservative values rather than racial prejudice. For example, people holding conservative values are more likely to object to government assistance to Blacks who violate traditional values. That means if Blacks act in accordance with the conservative values, they would be regarded as deserving for government assistance. In other words, Whites do not oppose Blacks' getting government help because they are Black. However, Blacks are often believed to be lazy and not working hard by conservatives. Bobo, Kluegel and Smith (1997) believe that in the post-World War II period, Jim Crow racism has been replaced by Laissez Faire racism. Jim Crow racism involves overt bigotry, advocacy of segregation and discrimination. Nowadays, Jim Crow racism has disappeared, but Laissez Faire racism brings about negative stereotyping of Blacks and blames Blacks for not working hard and causing racial inequality by themselves. Laissez Fair racism also causes people to oppose affirmative action and other public policies that aim to improve race-based inequalities.

Symbolic racism is also compared to aversive racism. Nail, Harton and Decker (2003) discuss and distinguish between symbolic racism or modern racism and aversive racism. They argue that symbolic racism or modern racism is widespread in society today, but it is expressed in a subtle and indirect manner, avoiding direct and explicit expressions of racism. They also believe that aversive racism, which refers to non-conscious negative feelings based on race, exists in the same subtle and indirect ways. Even though aversive racists believe in equal treatment for all, they still have negative feelings toward Blacks and other minorities that operate in a more subconscious manner.

All in all, there are different kinds of racism discussed by many scholars. Regardless of whether it is symbolic racism, new racism, Laissez Fair racism, or aversive racism, it is clear that racism still exists in modern society.

Attitudes toward welfare are racialized in the sense that racial attitudes predict welfare attitudes. Iyengar (1996) finds that how individuals attribute responsibility for poverty is also influenced by the characteristics of the poor featured in news coverage. Racial cues reflected in news coverage exert significant influence on viewers' attitudes toward poverty and crime. Consistent with Gilens' research, Winter (2006) finds that the framing of Social Security is associated with race. Social security has been associated with whiteness while welfare has been associated with blackness. As a result, the associations brought by framing racialize White attitudes toward Social Security.

Based on Gilens's research, Clawson and Trice (2000) examine images in news stories about poverty from 1993 to 1998 and investigate if stereotypical characteristics connected with the poor are reflected in news stories. They find that African Americans and nonworking adults were overrepresented in news stories. African Americans were especially associated with unpopular poverty stories, and African American women were depicted as having the most children. African Americans and Latinos are more likely to be examples of the poor with stereotypical characteristics in news stories. Such framing of poverty has an influence on public opinion as it leads to negative attitudes toward the poor and decreased support for welfare policy.

Race plays an important role in framing effects. No matter if the racial elements are directly mentioned or covertly hidden in frames, they may affect public opinion towards certain issues. Kellstedt (2000) believes that the framing effects of the media are very subtle. When the media talks about race, the coverage is not quite direct. The frames that affect public attitudes resonate with beliefs most Americans hold. However, when a story mentions some topics such as the economy, the messages the media convey are much more direct. People believe what the media says in those cases.

Banks and Valentino (2012) argue that anger triggers Whites' negative attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities, and boosts opposition to redistributive policies. Racism still exists in contemporary society. It has just changed its form from Jim Crow racism or old-fashioned racism to a newer, more subtle form of prejudice. The prevalent existence of racial prejudice greatly affects American politics. It exerts influence on Whites' opinions on redistributive public policies and negatively affects Whites' voting behavior and thus influences election results. Weber et al. (2014) believe that White-Black racial diversity strengthens the relationship between racial stereotypes and Whites' policy attitudes. In addition, this effect is more prominent among low self-monitors, who are guided by their private beliefs and inner dispositions. Put simply, low self-monitors who reside in an area that is racially diverse tend to rely on racial stereotypes to formulate policy preferences. In addition, this effect is more prominent in the policy issue matching a specific stereotype. For instance, people rely on the stereotype that Blacks are "lazy" to formulate their attitudes on welfare policies.

The racial cues in frames are not restricted to a White-Black division. ElBassiouny and Khan (2020) conducted a survey experiment to capture the variations in public opinion toward welfare recipients with different races and ethnicities, veteran status, and birthplaces. They found that respondents viewed the recipients more negatively when they were Black, Hispanic, not a veteran, or not born in America. By contrast, respondents viewed the recipients more positively when they were White, Asian, born in America, or veterans.

Haselswerdt (2020) found that respondents are more likely to make the assumption that social welfare programs benefit immigrants rather than Americans when the target population of immigrants is constructed as a fiscal threat. Public attitudes toward immigrants consequently exert an influence on welfare policy when this assumption is activated. However, a prime constructing immigrants as demographic threat or cultural threat did not have a significant influence on respondents. Hartman, Newman and Bell (2013) believe that Whites express their prejudice toward Hispanics by arguing the behaviors of Hispanics are inappropriate. Specifically, they claim Hispanics are illegal or economically threatening. According to modern racism (Hartman et al., 2013; Sniderman et al., 1991), which refers to a covert and subtle racism, Whites adopt a race-neutral rationale to express their prejudice. Public responses based on ethnicity influence immigration policies.

It is known to all that politics of race is not just a White-Black issue, it covers all races and ethnicities. However, there are fewer studies that have focused on Latinos as a target group, compared to studies that have focused on Blacks. Most of the experiments focus on Whites and Blacks, especially when the issue is about welfare programs. This is why I examine the effect of attitudes toward Latinos, in addition to attitudes toward Blacks, on support for welfare in my survey experiment. This is also part of my contribution to the existing literature.

In summary, we still know relatively little regarding how the mass public thinks about SNAP and the role of media framing in the formation of attitudes toward SNAP. My study will contribute to this literature in three ways. First, the surveys of FSP attitudes used in Gilens (1999)'s work were administered at least two decades ago. It is possible that people may develop dramatically different opinions about a specific program in twenty years. There is an agreement that TANF is racialized, but we do not really know if this racialization has spread to SNAP. If that is the

case, I would explore the conditions under which framing may or may not matter in this racialization. Second, although there are few existing studies of framing effects and welfare policy, they focus on TANF rather than SNAP. Third, just as I have mentioned, most studies of welfare policy focus on Whites and Blacks. Therefore, adding Latinos in my survey experiment will allow for a broader test of the importance of outgroup prejudice on perceptions of deservingness.

4. Theories

Based on the studies of public attitudes toward "welfare", it is obvious that "welfare" is unpopular. Is SNAP considered "welfare" by the public or something different? There are two possibilities pertaining to public attitudes toward SNAP. One possibility is that SNAP might be considered "welfare" by most people and might be racialized and negatively viewed in the same way as other "welfare" programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Huber and Paris (2013) tested whether respondents perceive welfare and assistance to the poor as the same programs. They argue that Americans may consider welfare and assistance to the poor to be different programs. They found that respondents are more likely to label programs such as food banks, homeless shelters and soup kitchens as assistance to the poor rather than welfare. However, there was nearly no difference between SNAP and TANF when respondents were asked whether they perceived these programs as welfare or assistance to the poor.

The other possibility is that SNAP might be different from "welfare". One reason this might be expected is evident in policy trends. SNAP has increased significantly while other "welfare" programs have remained stable (SSI) or have decreased in generosity (TANF). SNAP might be different and possibly immune or less affected by the racialization and other negativity that affects "welfare" more generally. This could be because in-kind assistance is viewed differently than cash assistance, especially when the in-kind assistance helps meet basic needs that people believe are a basic human right. Gilens (1999) considered the Food Stamp Program (FSP) to be a quasi-welfare program that is somewhat different from the typical cash welfare programs (such as TANF) because FSP provides coupons instead of money to recipients to purchase food. Based on surveys conducted in the 1990s, Gilens reported that only 9% of Americans believed that the government should increase spending on FSP, while 43% of Americans believed that the government should cut such spending. Although FSP was not very popular, Gilens found that it was more popular than typical welfare programs. In a more recent study, Campbell and Gaddis (2017) examined differences in regard to public support for different assistance programs. They found that in-kind assistance programs are more popular than cash assistance programs. They also showed that respondents remained more supportive of SNAP than cash assistance programs when they were asked to pay more tax to support increases in assistance. They also found that support for SNAP is more accepted by politicians regardless of whether they are Democrats or Republicans.

Another possible reason that SNAP may be viewed more positively is due to the fact that the recipient population is different. Whereas TANF is a rather homogenous program in which the recipient unit is generally an adult (single mother) and dependent children, the SNAP population is much more diverse and is represented by many different groups including the elderly and the disabled that are more positively constructed. The social construction of policy targets is an important political phenomenon that should not be overlooked in the study of public policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). A large literature has found that the social construction of target populations affects public officials and influences policy agendas and policy design (Pierce et al., 2014). Public officials tend to offer positively constructed groups beneficial policy and provide negatively constructed populations with punitive policy. One reason for this, it is argued, is that elected officials are motivated by reelection. When they design and adopt public policies, they will predict the response of the targeted groups and other groups who perceive the targeted groups as deserving or undeserving. Social constructions function as messages that are conveyed to citizens and affect their participation. Social construction theory disentangles the puzzle about why some groups of people are more advantaged than other groups of people (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The diverse recipient population of SNAP including the elderly and the disabled can be perceived by the public as more deserving than the homogenous recipient population of TANF. Thus, this is a possible reason that SNAP may be viewed more positively than general welfare programs.

In addition, SNAP recipients are far more likely to be White compared to TANF. In fiscal year 2018, of all SNAP recipients, 35.7% of participants were White, 25.1% were African-American, 16.7% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian, 1.5% were Native American, 0.8% were multiple races reported, and 17.4% were race unknown (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). In fiscal year 2013, "of all TANF assistance child recipients, 36.3% were Hispanic, 29.9% were African American, and 25.8% were non-Hispanic White (Falk, 2016)." In fiscal year 2015, of all TANF child recipients, 39.3% were Hispanic, 29% were African American, and 25.9% were white. In the same year, of all TANF adult recipients, 32.7% were White, 32.1% were African American, 29.3% were Hispanic (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Thus, if the racial and ethnic demographics of welfare programs affect public attitudes toward the programs, this is possibly why SNAP may be viewed more positively.

Although there are no studies that have examined media framing effects regarding SNAP, I believe framing effects also apply to SNAP under certain conditions. First, I expect the tone of media frames may matter. That is, positive frames lead people think positively, while negative frames make people think negatively about SNAP. In addition, there is good reason to believe racial cues in media framing may also affect public attitudes toward SNAP. It is therefore quite possible that people may express negative attitudes when they are asked to evaluate SNAP due to indirect and subtle racism, especially when they know or infer that SNAP recipients in news stories are racial and ethnic minorities. Accordingly, I will also test how the tone and racial cues of media frames interact to affect public opinion on SNAP.

5. Research Design

In the survey experiment, I tested how the race and ethnicity of the SNAP recipients implied in the news stories and the tone of the news story influence respondents' opinions toward SNAP. The design of the survey experiment is 2 × 3. Survey respondents were randomly assigned to one of six different versions of a news story about SNAP, resulting in six experimental groups based on the different combinations of story tone (positive, negative) and target race and ethnicity (White non-Latina, Black, Latina). Then, the respondents were asked a series of questions after reading a news story. To indicate the racial identity of the target, I choose names for the target that have been found to be strongly associated with each racial group. "Names such as DeShawn, Tyrone, Reginald, Shanice, Precious, Kiara, and Deja are quite popular among Blacks, but virtually unheard of for Whites. The opposite is true for names like Connor, Cody, Jake, Molly, Emily, Abigail, and Caitlin. Each of those names appears in at least 2,000 cases (between 1989–2000), with less than 2 percent of the recipients Black (Fryer & Levitt, 2004, p. 770)." For each racial identity, I utilize three different names.

Before the survey was sent out, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Alabama. To recruit survey respondents, I used Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Surveys that were taken by respondents who spent less than three minutes or more than thirty minutes were excluded. I have recruited 900 survey respondents on MTurk, each of which was randomly assigned to one of the six treatment groups. This sample includes racial and ethnic minorities, although Whites constitute a very large percentage of the sample. In the regression analyses, I estimated regressions based on a sample restricted to only White respondents.

Generally speaking, I define a positive frame as one that primes the values that make people sympathetic to the target in the news story. People who are struggling financially often experience serious food insecurity and do not know where their next meal is coming from. As it is known to all that having enough food to eat is a basic need, it is natural for people from all social classes to have sympathy for people who are experiencing hunger. Therefore, the positive tone treatment will include references to food insecurity. Additionally, to further establish a positive tone, I have chosen a mother with two children as the target in the news story. Generally, people are more sympathetic toward children than adults, especially in the context of poverty and public assistance (Schneider and Ingram 1993). Specifically, the news story portrays poor children as being distracted from their school work due to being hungry. The positive tone story suggests that thanks to SNAP, the children can focus on their studies because they are not hungry anymore. Such a description also reflects that these children are very deserving of assistance because they are eager to learn and their food insecurity is beyond their control.

Although the SNAP population is more diverse than other welfare programs such as TANF, I choose a mother with children as the target for the negative tone story so that I can hold the family structure of the target constant across treatment groups. This is important due to the fact that family structure is a characteristic of the target that may affect respondent perceptions of deservingness. In the negative tone story, I prime attitudes that are consistent with conservative values. Specifically, I include text which primes negative stereotypes of welfare recipients, including the view that SNAP makes people lazy, reluctant to work, and dependent on welfare assistance. Specifically, I describe a mother complaining that she is not only struggling to make ends meet with the benefits she has received, but also feels embarrassed and ashamed buying groceries. By comparison, it is clear that there is a world of difference between the positive frame and the negative frame. The survey experiment will help us to understand how different frames affect public opinion on SNAP.

The dependent variable is public attitudes toward federal spending on SNAP. After being randomly assigned to read a version of the news story, respondents were asked whether they think spending on SNAP should be increased, decreased, or remain unchanged. Specifically, I used a seven-point response scale to capture the degree of support or opposition: Decreased a great deal (1), Decreased a moderate amount (2), Decreased a little(3), Kept the same (4), Increased a little (5), Increased a moderate amount (6), Increased a great deal (7).The treatment variables are news story tone and race of target. Race of target is coded 0 if the recipient is White, 1 if she is Black, and 2 if she is Latina. The tone of the news story is coded 0 if survey respondents are assigned to the story with a negative tone and 1 if they read the story with a positive tone.

In addition, all survey respondents were asked questions with regard to their characteristics, such as gender, age, race and ethnicity, education, marital status, income, the area where they live (urban/suburban/rural), and etc. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for independent variables.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Negative/Positive Tone	615	N/A	N/A	0	1
Race of Target	615	N/A	N/A	0	2
Marital Status	614	N/A	N/A	1	5
Gender	613	N/A	N/A	1	2
Income	614	11.5391	6.3668	1	26
Education	615	4.7138	1.2238	1	8
Birth Year	615	N/A	N/A	1	9
Area	614	N/A	N/A	1	3

Hypothesis 1: People who read a news story with a positive tone are more likely to express positive attitudes toward SNAP compared to people who read a news story with a negative tone.

Hypothesis 2: People who read a news story indicating the recipient is Black or Latina are more likely to express negative attitudes toward SNAP compared to people who read a news story indicating the recipient is White.

6. Data Analysis

I used multiple linear regression to estimate the relationship between the dependent variable Spending and the independent variables. The variable Spending refers to public attitudes toward federal spending on SNAP. The main independent variables are the treatment variables: Negative/Positive Tone which stands for negative or positive tone of news stories, Race of Target which stands for the perceived race or ethnicity of SNAP recipients.

There are two types of possibilities with regard to interaction effects among the two treatment variables. The first type of possibility is that there is no interaction at all between the two treatment variables Negative/Positive Tone and Race of Target. The second type of possibility is that the two treatment variables Negative/Positive Tone and Race of Target interact with each other to affect the outcome variable. For example, it could be that the effect of the race of target depends on the tone of media framing so that race of target only matters when the tone is negative.

Given the two possibilities, I ran two multiple linear regression models respectively. Table 2 displays the results of multiple linear regressions (Model 1 and 2). Model 1 is the regression model without interaction between treatment variables. Model 2 is the model where two treatment variables interact. The treatment variable Negative/Positive Tone is not statistically significant in all these models. However, the difference is that the variable Race of Target (Latina) is statistically significant in Model 1 at the 5% level. This result indicates that survey respondents are more likely to support decreasing government spending when the perceived race of a SNAP recipient in a news story is Latina compared to those who read a news story about a White SNAP recipient. The results regarding control variables show that Income and Area are statistically significant. Specifically, the more wealth survey respondents hold, the more likely they are to support decreasing government spending. Survey respondents who live in suburban areas are more likely to support decreasing government spending compared to those who live in urban areas. Similarly, survey respondents who live in rural areas are more likely to support decreasing government spending compared to those who live in urban areas.

Table 2 Regression Estimates for Treatment Variables

Treatment and Control Variable	Spending	
	Model 1 (Without Interaction)	Model 2 (With Interaction)
Negative/Positive Tone	0.1529 (0.12518)	0.1935 (0.21320)
Race of Target (0 White)		
1 Black	-0.2452 (0.15397)	-0.1426 (0.21801)
2 Latina	-0.3115* (0.15223)	-0.3421 (0.21120)
Negative/Positive Tone#Race of Target		
1 1		-0.2082

		(0.30914)
1 2		0.0690
		(0.30103)
Marital Status (1 Married)		
2 Widowed	-0.3985	-0.3971
	(0.50367)	(0.50441)
3 Divorced	-0.3661	-0.3846
	(0.27163)	(0.27292)
4 Separated	-0.6663	-0.6488
	(0.69810)	(0.69919)
5 Never Married	-0.2011	-0.1944
	(0.15280)	(0.15313)
Gender	-0.0437	-0.0435
	(0.12610)	(0.12628)
Income	-0.0375***	-0.0380***
	(0.01036)	(0.01039)
Education	-0.0490	-0.0456
	(0.05527)	(0.05551)
Birth Year	-0.0490	-0.0479
	(0.03412)	(0.03417)
Area (1 Urban)		
2 Suburban	-0.4689***	-0.4669***
	(0.14314)	(0.14330)
3 Rural	-0.5041**	-0.4944**
	(0.17677)	(0.17735)
Observations	610	610
R-squared	0.0718	0.0731

Note: Cell entries are slope coefficients (and standard errors).
*=p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

In addition to the multiple linear regression models, I also used ordered logit regression model to estimate the relation between the dependent variable Spending and Independent variables. Besides the two treatment variables, I also included some control variables that are Marital Status, Gender, Income, Education, Birth Year, and Area.

Table 3 Ordered Logit Regression Estimates for Determinants of Spending

Independent Variables	Spending
Negative/Positive Tone	0.2329
	(0.14632)
Race of Target (0 White)	
1 Black	-0.2901
	(0.17935)
2 Latina	-0.3641*
	(0.17727)
Marital Status (1 Married)	
2 Widowed	-0.2472
	(0.61576)
3 Divorced	-0.4125
	(0.32295)
4 Separated	-0.6845
	(0.82964)
5 Never Married	-0.2948
	(0.17466)
Gender	-0.0274
	(0.14743)
Income	-0.0401***
	(0.01238)
Education	-0.0240
	(0.06564)
Birth Year	-0.0535
	(0.03939)
Area (1 Urban)	

2 Suburban	-0.5214**
	(0.16662)
3 Rural	-0.4736*
	(0.20903)
Observations	610
Pseudo R2	0.0191

Note: Cell entries are coefficients (and standard errors).
*=p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3 demonstrates that the treatment variable Negative/Positive Tone is not statistically significant. However, the treatment variable Race of Target (Latina) is statistically significant in this model. The coefficient for Race of Target (Latina)is-0.3641. This result is very similar to the result of the multiple linear regression Model 1. It indicates that survey respondents are more likely to support decreasing government spending when the perceived race of a SNAP recipient in a news story is Latina compared to those who read a news story about a White welfare recipient.

7. Conclusion

From the interpretation of the regression results, we can see that the tone of a news story does not matter. The treatment variable of story tone is not statistically significant in every regression model regardless of whether it is in a multiple linear regression model or an ordered logit regression model. Therefore, it cannot support my first hypothesis: People who read a news story with a positive tone are more likely to express positive attitudes toward SNAP compared to people who read a news story with a negative tone. In other words, positive frames do not lead people think positively about SNAP, while negative frames do not make people think negatively.

As the results have shown in multiple linear regression Model 1 and the ordered logit regression model, the ethnicity of target matters. These regression models reveal that the treatment of news stories about a Latina recipient has an influence on respondents' attitudes toward federal spending on SNAP. When survey respondents read a SNAP news story about a Latina recipient, they are more likely to support decreasing federal spending on SNAP compared to those who read a news story about a White recipient. This finding provides evidence to support my second hypothesis although the results with regard to the effect of the race treatment are mixed. In these regression models, the Black treatment variable is not statistically significant.

As many scholars have argued, racism still exists in contemporary society, regardless of whether it is symbolic racism, new racism, Laissez Fair racism, or aversive racism. It is therefore quite possible that people may express negative attitudes when they are asked to evaluate SNAP due to indirect and subtle racism, especially when they know or infer that SNAP recipients in news stories are racial and ethnic minorities. I expected that all race treatment variables in all my regression models are statistically significant. However, the mixed results are not exactly as what I predicted. There might be several reasons contributing to the mixed results. First of all, Amazon MTurk survey respondents may tend to be more liberal with higher educational backgrounds. Second, although I have a relatively large sample size, the size of each treatment group is relatively small. Third, the survey respondents do not want to appear to be racists because the race treatments may be a bit too strong, so they may have self-corrected their answers. Anyway, the multiple linear regression Model 1 and the ordered logit regression model have provided evidence that ethnic identity of recipients does exert an influence on public attitudes toward SNAP.

In summary, this survey experiment tells us that it is possible that media framing can affect public attitudes toward SNAP, especially when people read a SNAP news story about a recipient who is ethnic minority. I believe this experiment generalizes to the real world because MTurk survey respondents are representative of the population. However, one important difference is that MTurk survey respondents have higher educational backgrounds than the general U.S. population. Among the survey respondents in this experiment, 74.73% of them had completed a bachelor's degree or higher. In contrast, the percentage of U.S. population who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher was 37.9% in 2021 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). In the future, I would like to do the same experiment with a different sample that is more representative than the current MTurk sample if it is possible. I am curious to know if a more representative sample would yield different results.

The implication of the findings is that racial prejudice still affects how the public think about a welfare program and its recipients. It exerts an influence on a public policy's development and the policy-making process. In order to adopt a public policy that can benefit the public regardless of the race or ethnicity of the recipients, more efforts need to be made to minimize racial prejudice in the society. It may be a long journey to go to totally eliminate racial prejudice and racial stereotypes in the society, but it is necessary to take actions because racial prejudice affects public policies that benefit the public.

References

Abrajano, M. A., Hajnal, Z., & Hassell, H. J. G. (2017). Media framing and partisan identity: The case of immigration coverage and White macropartisanship. *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics,2*(2017), 5-34.

Banks, A., & Valentino, N. (2012). Emotional substrates of White racial attitudes. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(2), 286–297.

Bobo, L., Kluegel, J. R., & Smith, R. A.(1997). Laissez-faire racism: The crystallization of a 'kindler, genter' anti-Black ideology. In S. A. Tuch, & J. K. Martin (Eds.), *Racial attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and change.* Praeger.

Campbell, C., & Gaddis, S. M. (2017). "I don't agree with giving cash": A survey experimental examining support for public assistance. *Social Science Quarterly,98*(5), 1352-1373.

Chong, D., &Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *The Annual Review of Political Science,10*(2007), 103-126.

Clawson, R. A., & Trice, R. (2000). Poverty as we know it: Media portrayals of the poor. *The Public Opinion Quarterly,64*(1), 53-64.

Druckman, J. N. (2001). The implications of framing effects for citizen competence. *Political Behavior,23*(3), 225-256.

EIBassiouny, A., & Sabith K. (2020). Impact of race/ethnicity, veteran status, and place of birth on attitudes towards welfare recipients: An experimental approach. *Psychological Reports,0*(0), 1-21.

EPP, D. A., & Jennings, J. T. (2020). Inequality, media frames, and public support for welfare. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 84*(3), 629-653.

Falk, G. (2016). Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Size and characteristics of the cash assistance caseload. *Congressional Research Service,* (January),1-21.

Fryer, R. G., & Levitt, S. D. (2004). The causes and consequences of distinctively black names. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 119*(3), 767-805.

Gilens, M. (1999). *Why Americans hate welfare: race, media, and the politics of antipoverty policy*. The University of Chicago Press.

Haselswerdt, J. (2020). Social welfare attitudes and immigrants as a target population: Experimental evidence. *Perspectives on Politics,2020*(September),1-18.

Hartman, T. K., Newman, B. J., & Bell, C. S. (2013). Decoding prejudice toward Hispanics: Group cues and public reactions to threatening immigrant behavior. *Political Behavior, 36*(2014), 143-163.

Huber, G. A., & Celia P. (2013). Assessing the programmatic equivalence assumption in question wording experiments understanding why Americans like assistance to the poor more than welfare. *Public Opinion Quarterly,77*(1), 385-397.

Iyengar, S., & Simon, A. (1993). News coverage of the Gulf crisis and public opinion. *Communication Research,20*(3), 365-383.

Iyengar, S. (1996). Framing responsibility for political issues. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 546, 59-70.

Kellstedt, P. M. (2000). Media framing and the dynamics of racial policy preferences. *American Journal of Political Science,44*(2), 245-260.

Kinder, D., & Sears, D. (1981). Prejudice and politics: Symbolic racism versus racial threats to the good life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 40*(3), 414-431.

Nail, P. R., Harton, H. C., & Decker, B. P. (2003). Political orientation and modern versus aversive racism: Tests of Dovidio and Gaertner's (1998) integrated model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(4), 754-770.

Nelson, T. E., Oxley, Z. M., & Clawson, R. A. (1997). Toward a psychology of framing effects. *Political Behavior,19*(3), 221-246.

Norris, R. J., &Mullinix, K. J. (2019). Framing innocence: An experimental test of the effects of wrongful convictions on public opinion. *Journal of Experimental Criminology,2020*(16), 311-334.

Pierce, J. J., Saba S., Michael D. J., Kristin S., Andrew P., &Holly P. (2014). Social construction and policy design: A review of past applications. *Policy Studies Journal,42*(1), 1-29.

Schneider, A., & Helen I. (1993). Social construction of target populations: Implications for politics and policy. *The American Political Science Review,87*(2), 334-347.

Schneider, S. K., & Jacoby, W. G. (2005). Elite discourse and American public opinion: The case of welfare spending. *Political Research Quarterly,58*(3), 367-379.

Sniderman, P. M., Piazza, T., Tetlock, P. E., &Kendrick, A. (1991). The new racism. *American Journal of Political Science*, *35*(2), 423-447.

Tarman, C., & Sears, D. (2005). The conceptualization and measurement of symbolic racism. The Journal of Politics,*67*(3), 731–761.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). *Census Bureau releases new educational attainment data*. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/educational-attainment.html

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support. (2019). *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program households: Fiscal year 2018.*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance. (2018). *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families 12th Report to Congress.*

Waymer, D. (2009). Walking in fear: An autoethnographic account of media framing of inner-city crime. *Journal of Communication Inquiry,33*(2), 169-184.

Weber, C. R., Lavine, H., Huddy, L., & Federico, C. M. (2014).Placing racial stereotypes in context: Social desirability and the politics of racial hostility. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(1), 63–78.

Winter, N. J.G. (2006). Beyond welfare: Framing and the racialization of White opinion on social security. *American Journal of Political Science,50*(2), 400-420.