How Norm-Based Issue Frames Shape Public Support for Refugee Protection Policy: An Analysis Based on Survey Experiments in France and Germany

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Abstract

This research uses experiments to examine whether the way that refugee protection is framed in the context of specific norms affects individuals' support for it as a policy issue across France and Germany. The treatments employ frames that emphasize human rights, violence against women (VAW), human security, humanitarianism, and autonomy norms, all of which are reflected in both the forced displacement literature and advocacy for refugees. The experiments provide some evidence that only certain norm-based issue frames have an effect on support for refugee protection policy, suggesting that some norms may be more powerful than others for garnering support in this issue area. The conclusion discusses these findings relative to the extant literature and considers the implications for advocates who seek to address the issue of refugee protection.

Keywords: forced displacement, refugees, public policy, issue frames, norms

Cómo los marcos temáticos basados en normas dan forma al apoyo público a la política de protección de refugiados: un análisis basado en experimentos de encuestas en Francia y Alemania

Resumen

Esta investigación utiliza experimentos para examinar si la forma en que se enmarca la protección de los refugiados en el contexto de normas específicas afecta el apoyo de las personas a ella como una cuestión política en Francia y Alemania. Los tratamientos emplean marcos que enfatizan los derechos humanos, la violencia contra la mujer, la seguridad humana, el humanitarismo y las normas de

autonomía, todo lo cual se refleja tanto en la literatura sobre desplazamiento forzado como en la defensa de los refugiados. Los experimentos proporcionan alguna evidencia de que solo ciertos marcos temáticos basados en normas tienen un efecto en el apoyo a la política de protección de refugiados, lo que sugiere que algunas normas pueden ser más poderosas que otras para obtener apoyo en esta área temática. La conclusión analiza estos hallazgos en relación con la literatura existente y considera las implicaciones para los defensores que buscan abordar el tema de la protección de los refugiados.

Palabras clave: Desplazamiento forzado, refugiados, políticas públicas, marcos temáticos, normas

基于规范的框架如何影响公众对难民保护政策的支持：基于法国和德国的调查实验分析

摘要

本研究通过实验分析特定规范下对难民保护的描述方式是否会影响法国和德国个人对难民保护这一政策议题的支持。实验运用了强调一系列规范的框架，规范包括人权、针对妇女的暴力、人类安全、人道主义、以及自主权，这些规范都在有关被迫流离失所的文献和难民倡导中有所体现。实验证明，仅部分基于规范的议题框架对支持难民保护政策产生了效果，这暗示一些规范可能比另一些在聚集难民保护支持上更有效。结论探讨了这些研究发现与现有文献的相关性，并考量了对试图应对难民保护议题的倡导者产生的意义。

关键词：被迫流离失所，难民，公共政策，议题框架，规范

Introduction

Research on normative framing examines how policymakers or advocates deliberately use norms to structure or present a problem or issue in such a way as to maximize support. The existing literature on normative framing addresses many important policy issues, including environmental sustainability (Hurlstone et al. 2014; Raymond and Delshad 2016; Raymond 2016; Singh and Swanson 2017; Wiest et al. 2015), women's issues (Raymond et al. 2014; Weldon and Raymond 2013), and child marriage (Shaw-

ki 2015). This literature tends to focus on the impact of norm-based framing on policy change, or how advocates employ certain norms or frames to promote a given position. Although some studies examine how specific norm-based frames shape public opinion, almost no scholarly attention has been paid to the question of whether norms can be used to garner public support for contentious issues that have become both highly politicized and securitized, such as the protection of refugees, even though this issue lies at the heart of some of the most significant humanitarian crises of our time (Betts 2015; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2016). As a result, even though global need has increased, mobilizing adequate domestic support for policies aimed at refugee protection has been a key challenge facing many liberal democracies. In the United States and many European countries, for example, refugee protection has become heavily politicized and securitized in light of increasing nationalism and far-right party gains, making it difficult for both the general public, advocates, and policymakers to reach a consensus on how to appropriately address the issue. Prior research has shown that in such situations when the normative foundation of an issue is contested, normative framing can be particularly effective (Armitage and Conner 2000). This raises the question: can norms be used to construct the issue of refugee protection in such a way as to increase public support for refugee protection policy?

To examine how alternative ways of framing refugee protection based on different norms impact public opinion about refugee protection policy, this research uses an experimental approach. Survey experiments in France and Germany focus on frames that position refugee protection in the context of human rights, violence against women (VAW), human security, humanitarianism, and autonomy norms. These different norms are reflected both in the literature on forced displacement and migration, and in the advocacy of organizations that promote refugee protection in Europe (Schnyder and Shawki 2020). As this research is exploratory, the prediction is that each type of norm-based frame should increase public support for the protection of refugees relative to the control group. The findings show that only certain norm-based frames shape support for refugee protection policy among the general public in these two countries. The conclusion offers a brief discussion of the implications of the results for the literature and for the creation of policy given recent calls from analysts for new solutions in addressing the plight of refugees amid trends in liberal democracies toward more restrictive policy provisions.

Issue Frames and Refugee Protection

Issue framing impacts how people process information. A frame emphasizes certain aspects of the issue at hand, and in so doing highlights the dimensions of the issue that are in-frame and out-of-frame (Snow 2013). For a given issue, in-frame dimensions can be used by advocates to construct

and communicate a certain narrative. Thus, the process of framing can redefine the way a particular issue or aspect of a problem is perceived and understood (Snow 2013). Through this process of "meaning construction" (Snow 2013, 470), advocates form a collective interpretation of a particular problem. This entails highlighting the cause of the problem, proposing solutions, and mobilizing people to engage in joint action to bring about the desired change. Issue frames can therefore be used to generate consensus about the nature of a problem and the solutions required to confront it, and can motivate people to take action in the particular ways suggested by the frame (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2013). The issue-framing literature provides robust evidence that public opinion varies according to how an issue is presented (Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Chong and Druckman 2007; Jacoby 2000; Krosnick and Kinder 1990). Since public opinion influences policymaking (Stimson et al. 1995; Soroka and Wlezien 2010), the framing of a particular issue can affect policy responses to it and, in turn, the prospects for effective action (Keohane 2015).

Recent studies on norm-based change have shown how norms can be incorporated into issue-framing processes (Raymond 2016; Raymond et al. 2014; Raymond and Delshad 2016; Raymond and Weldon 2013). Advocates may draw upon a particular norm and use that norm to frame an issue with the goal of changing what is considered to be the "standard of appropriate behavior" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891), thus setting the stage for social and political change. Because different norms apply to different contexts, advocates must determine which norms make sense for particular problems or situations (Raymond and Weldon 2013). Through the strategy of normative reframing, for example, advocates work to reframe an issue in terms of a different norm that suggests different behaviors or policies compared to the status quo (Raymond et al. 2014; Raymond and Weldon 2013). Put differently, the process of normative framing involves attempts by norm entrepreneurs to apply a specific norm to an issue in crafting a frame so as to resonate with a target audience (Payne 2001). Normative reframing is a particularly useful framing strategy when there exists a weak "fit" between the status quo norm and the issue at hand. In such situations, advocates can attempt to reframe the issue by applying an alternative norm that they argue better applies (Raymond et al. 2014). The issue of VAW provides an example. In some countries, change advocates have been able to utilize international human rights and gender equality norms to argue that these norms apply to the issue of VAW. By reframing VAW as a matter of human rights (rather than a private domestic matter between individuals), advocates can change the way that VAW is viewed as a public policy issue (Weldon and Raymond 2013). In reframing the issue, advocates seek to apply the strongest possible norm(s) in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the newly proposed norm and render it difficult to infringe upon (Raymond et al. 2014).

There are often multiple norms that can apply to a given issue or problem, and absent definitive knowledge on which norm will have the greatest influence in producing political change, advocates must deliberate to settle on what they perceive to be a strong norm-based frame (Raymond et al. 2014). It is possible that different norm-based issue frames can generate different "framing effects" – a phenomenon well-documented in public opinion research. Framing effects occur when changes in how an issue is presented produce changes in public opinion on that issue (Chong and Druckman 2007). Often, even small changes to the presentation of an issue can result in dramatic fluctuations in opinion: "For example, when asked whether they would favor or oppose allowing a hate group to hold a political rally, 85% of respondents answered in favor if the question was prefaced with the suggestion, 'Given the importance of free speech,' whereas only 45% were in favor when the question was prefaced with the phrase, 'Given the risk of violence'" (Chong and Druckman 2007, 104, citations omitted). In this way, different ways of framing the same basic issue can significantly change its meaning to respondents (Zaller 1992). Framing effects can therefore be expected inasmuch as an issue can be viewed from multiple perspectives and can be presented as having implications for many different norms, values, or beliefs (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Both the extant literature and the mobilization work by advocates reflect a number of different norm-based frames that are currently applied to the issue of refugee protection. For one, refugee protection is perhaps most commonly discussed in terms of human rights norms (Betts 2015; Orchard 2014; O'Flaherty and Fisher 2008; Millbank 2004; UNHCR 2016; United Nations 2013). For example, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCR 1993, 2) argues that "There is a clear relationship between the refugee problem and the issue of human rights." In addition to human rights violations being a major cause of forced displacement, disregard for human rights is also a problem during the process of seeking asylum, leading to the conclusion that "Respect for human rights is a necessary condition for both preventing and resolving today's refugee flows" (UNOHCR 1993, 2). Some scholars argue that certain types of norms tend to be more influential in changing behavior than others, with human rights norms being among the strongest due to their wide appeal, broad acceptance, and logical consistency (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Raymond et al. 2014). More broadly, the public tends to see human rights as important (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005). This leads to the expectation that framing refugee protection in terms of human rights norms will lead individuals to increase their support for this policy issue. This is expressed in hypothesis form as:

Hypothesis 1: Respondents will increase their support for refugee protection when it is framed as a human rights issue.

Beyond human rights, several studies analyze VAW norms and their impact on policy change. For example, Weldon (2006) shows how activists deliberated to create new norms related to preventing VAW, and how the intentional creation of the VAW concept allowed for agreement on a common set of behaviors to be prohibited by these new norms, ultimately resulting in the first Intergovernmental Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Raymond and Weldon 2013; Weldon 2006). Applying VAW framing to refugee protection, experimental research shows that American conservatives are more likely to support taking in refugees when it is framed as a matter of protecting women and children from violence (Sullivan and Rich 2017). In addition, research focusing on the European context shows that the public holds more favorable attitudes toward the inclusion of refugee girls (Bešić et al. 2018). Moreover, many NGO advocates employ a VAW frame when advocating for refugees, focusing on the domestic conditions that reinforce gender-based violence in many societies and thus cause women to flee (UNHCR n.d.; Women's Refugee Commission 2020). Taken together, this line of research and advocacy suggest that individuals may be more likely to become more supportive of a policy when it is framed in terms of VAW norms. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Respondents will increase their support for refugee protection when it is framed as a matter of violence against women.

Over the past decades, the emerging norm of human security has occupied a central place in discussions of many global issues. The human security norm prioritizes the security of individuals, groups, and communities over traditional notions of state security (Mahmud et al. 2008). It stresses two aspects in particular: (1) safety from protracted threats including hunger, disease, and repression and (2) protection from sudden and harmful disruptions that negatively impact daily life (United Nations Development Program 1994). The academic literature applies the human security norm to many aspects of refugee protection, from the domestic conflicts that force displacement to the risks inherent in the journey to safety to the impact on host communities (Adelman 2006; Berti 2015; Edwards 2009; Jacobsen 2003; Odutayo 2016). In addition, UNHCR now places the refugee issue in a broader context of human security, as "[p]rotection of refugees is now primarily defined as security of refugees and refugee operations rather than in terms of the legal asylum process" (Adelman 2006, 7), as do other advocacy groups (e.g., Amnesty International 2020; European Council on Refugees and Exiles 2016). The framing of refugee protection as a human security issue, reflected in both the academic literature and advocacy, leads to the next hypothesis:

H3: Respondents will increase their support for refugee protection when it is framed in terms of human security.

The norm of humanitarianism is also relevant to the issue of refugee protection. Humanitarian norms generally in-

volve the obligation to assist vulnerable populations, and often involve actions by non-governmental organizations (Mills 2005). Applied to the behavior of states, Finnemore (1996) documents the importance of humanitarian norms in shaping patterns of military intervention over time. Song (2013) analyzes the application of humanitarianism to refugee protection specifically, noting inconsistencies between international legal frameworks and humanitarian responses. Similarly, in writing about refugee protection, Betts (2015, n.p.) explains that "The humanitarian principle implies that we have particular obligations toward those in need." In addition, refugee advocates often emphasize the vulnerability of those who are forcibly displaced in alluding to the humanitarian norm (e.g., Liberty n.d.; Caritas n.d.). When it comes to public opinion, Blitz (2018) draws on surveys conducted by Amnesty International, the European Social Survey, and Pew Global Attitudes Survey across the European Union to document public support for humanitarian policy regarding refugees. In general, the literature notes that such "'moral' norms appealing to ethical or religious justifications are seen to be especially influential due to their deep-rooted nature and resistance to compromise" (Raymond et al. 2014, 200, citations omitted). This brings about the following hypothesis:

H4: Respondents will increase their support for refugee protection when it is framed in terms of humanitarianism.

The last norm examined is that of autonomy, which generally underlies the principle of self-determination. Applied to those who have been forcibly displaced, self-determination may be seen as a principle empowering those who are marginalized, as opposed to a claim within or against a state (Maguire and Elton 2019). As many advocacy groups note, for the forcibly displaced the need to escape violence and war invokes the ability to control their own destiny (Alexander-Nathani 2017; La Cimade 2012; No One is Illegal 2003). The "universal applicability" and "strength" (McVay 2012, 36) of this norm may be useful for protecting such populations, leading to the final hypothesis:

H5: Respondents will increase their support for refugee protection when it is framed in terms of autonomy, or the ability to control one's fate.

In sum, the findings of extant studies, while mixed, together imply that certain frames are likely to generate support for refugee protection. Taking these findings as the point of departure, this study contributes to the current discourse by examining how alternative ways of framing refugee protection affect opinion about refugee protection policy.

Experimental Protocol

Individuals over the age of eighteen in France and Germany were recruited to the experiments using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) from June through August 2019. These countries were selected based on several factors. First, France and Germany were among the EU member states with the highest

number of asylum applicants granted protection status in 2015, the height of Europe's refugee crisis (Eurostat 2016). In addition, each of these countries has longstanding and active migrant and refugee rights movements defined by the work of many civil society organizations and activist networks (Schnyder 2015). Yet opposition to refugee protection and migration in general can also be observed in these countries, primarily through far-right political party stances against it. In 2015, for example, France's far-right political party (Rassemblement National, formerly Front National) won 28 percent of the vote and won in the first round of France's 2017 presidential elections (European Election Database 2017), and Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany party has recently garnered a strong showing in the former Communist East (Bennhold and Eddy 2019). Thus, national debates over refugee protection are prominent in each of these countries in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis.

Prior analyses of MTurk data have shown that it generates valid estimates of treatment effects (Berinsky et al. 2012; Goodman et al. 2013). While MTurk samples are generally more reflective of the population compared to other convenience samples (Berinsky et al. 2012; Goodman et al. 2013; Huff and Tingley 2015), they are not representative. Therefore, while the use of MTurk data does not harm internal validity, it does impact the ability to make external generalizations.

High quality samples have been collected on MTurk for as little as US$0.10 (Goodman et al. 2013). In this study, participants were paid US$1.50 each for participation, regardless of whether or not the participant completed the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to a control group or to treatments in which they were asked to read a paragraph that framed refugee protection as a human rights issue, an issue of VAW, a human security issue, a humanitarianism issue, or an issue of autonomy. The experiments thus consist of five treatment groups and a control group (which saw no frame). The five frames are presented in Table 1. After viewing their respective frames, participants were then asked to complete a short questionnaire (see Appendix). The experiments were administered online.

Table 1. Text of Frames

Human Rights Frame (n=44)

Some people might be threatened just because of who they are or what they do or believe—for example, for their ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or political opinions. These are violations of basic human rights. The risks to their safety and life are so great that they feel they have no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect their human

rights. Everyone is entitled to full protection of their human rights, but refugees must rely on another country to make sure that their human rights are protected. Seeking protection in another country is a human right that everyone has.

Violence Against Women Frame (n=35)

Increasingly, many refugees are women and children. Many women are forced to leave their own country because their government will not protect them against forced marriage, human trafficking, domestic violence, or other forms of violence against women. When they leave, they often bring their children along to protect them. Along the way, they face different forms of violence at all stages of their journey toward peace. They must rely on another country to make sure that they receive protection against violence.

Human Security Frame (n=40)

Governments normally guarantee the security of their citizens. But when people become refugees, this safety net disappears. Because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, they are no longer secure in their own country. They have no protection and must rely on another country to make sure that they receive the security they need. For many, leaving one country for another is a complicated process with risks and insecurities. They face attacks and are at risk of being exploited or suffering discrimination. If other countries do not let them in or protect them, their basic security and even their lives are in danger.

Humanitarian Frame (n=38)

Refugees are some of the most vulnerable people in the world. Often they must leave everything behind when they leave their countries. Many religious organizations provide refugees with protection and support. Refugees and other extremely vulnerable people rely on these humane actions that value the sanctity of human life. This requires that people work to uphold certain values, including an open and welcoming approach to the "stranger," to the neighbor in need, and to those in distress. When societies welcome refugees, they respect the dignity of every human being and promote an inclusive community.

Autonomy Frame (n=38)

In the twentieth century, governments around the world started to place more limits on peoples' freedom of movement. For people who need to escape violence and war, this means that they are not free to control their own destiny because they may not be allowed into a safe country. Some people think that everyone should have the ability to decide for themselves where they wish to live and work. They

believe that this is part of controlling our own lives. After all, people have always moved and always will. Since the beginning of the human species, people have not stopped moving on the surface of the Earth. Today, roughly 244 million people live outside of the country they were born in. For as far back as we can trace our history, migration has been a part of the human condition.

Note: Respondents were randomly assigned to a treatment frame. The control group (n=46) did not see a frame. In each treatment group, the paragraph was prefaced with the following definition of a refugee: "A refugee is someone who has been forced to escape his or her country because of war, or because they are being threatened with extreme violence, death, or other types of inhumane treatment in their own country." Roscoe (1975) proposes the rules of thumb (as cited in Sekaran and Bougie 2010, 296–97) concerning minimal sample sizes per group of thirty as appropriate. Here, a minimum sample size of thirty-five is required for a minimum desired power of 0.72 and a 90 percent confidence interval (Brant n.d.).

Source: Civil society organization framing of refugee protection as researched and reported in Schnyder and Shawki 2020.

Consistent with the study's IRB protocol, participants provided consent online prior to reading the framing paragraphs and answering the survey questions. Before they took part in the experiments, participants were shown a description of what the experiments would entail, the estimated time for completion, and compensation details. Participants were also informed that their MTurk "worker IDs" would only be collected for the purposes of distributing compensation and would not be shared with anyone. If consent was given, then participants had the opportunity to click on a link to proceed to the next screen.

The MTurk sample across France and Germany consists of 259 respondents. Because eighteen respondents did not correctly answer a "filter" question, the usable sample consists of 241 respondents. The sample is pooled across the two countries in order to maximize the total number of participants per treatment group.

The survey experiments include three dependent variables. First, to measure the absolute importance of refugee protection respondents were asked to assign a value from 0 to 10 to the importance of refugee protection policy, with 0 representing no importance and 10 representing very high importance. Next, since an individual could rank refugee protection as having high absolute importance, but rank it low in comparison to other issues perceived as salient, the relative importance of refugee protection is measured as the rank that respondents assign to refugee protection compared to six other salient global issues: climate change, democratization, global public health, international economic policy, the spread of nuclear weapons, and terrorism. These issues were gleaned from a Gallup poll (Riffkin 2014), a Pew Research Center poll (Stokes 2013), and the Eurobarometer survey (Eurobarometer 2014). Lastly, in order to measure participants' views on refugee protection relative

to the status quo (Sullivan and Rich 2017), respondents were asked whether the number of refugees allowed to enter their respective country should increase, stay about the same, or decrease. The summary statistics for each dependent variable are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary Statistics for Dependent Variables

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Rating, Importance of Refugee Protection	7.25	2.23	0	10
Ranking, Importance of Refugee Protection (1=most important)	4.42	1.52	1	7
Number of Refugees Should (1=decrease, 2=stay about the same, 3=increase)	2.05	0.73	1	3

Source: Survey experiments.

The Effects of Framing on Support for Refugee Protection

The effects of the different treatments are examined using a difference-in-means estimator. The results are reported in Table 3.

The first dependent variable of focus is individuals' opinions about the absolute importance of refugee protection. Table 3 conveys differences in mean ratings of the importance of refugee protection policy across the five treatments. Differences are considered relative to the control group, for which the mean rating of refugee protection importance on the 0-10 scale is 7.50. Overall, there is not a statistically significant framing effect in any of the treatments, which does not support the hypotheses.

Next, the relative measure of refugee protection policy importance is considered, in which refugee protection policy importance is ranked relative to

the six other major global issues. The measure ranges from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). In the control group, the mean ranking of refugee protection policy is 4.26. Again, Table 3 illustrates the differences in the mean rankings of the importance of refugee protection policy across the five treatments, relative to the control group. Similar to the dependent variable of absolute importance (above), the results indicate no statistically significant effect of framing on the rankings of the importance of refugee protection in any of the treatments, which again works against the hypotheses. These generally null findings may arise because for each of these dependent variables, the means show little variation across groups. When asked about the general "importance" of refugee protection, individuals' opinions are similar across treatment group and between treatment groups and the control group. It is possible that the "importance" phrasing is not a specific enough measure of support.

Table 3. Refugee Protection Frames and Ratings of Support for Refugee Protection Policy

	Estimated Treatment Effect	Mean Score	Two-Tailed *p*-value	90% Confidence Interval
DV: Importance of Refugee Protection				
Human Rights Frame	-0.068	7.43	0.440	6.89, 7.97
Violence against Women Frame	-0.043	7.46	0.469	6.78, 8.14
Human Security Frame	-0.500	7.00	0.147	6.43, 7.57
Humanitarian Frame	-0.447	7.05	0.185	6.41, 7.69
Autonomy Frame	-0.474	7.03	0.165	6.44, 7.62
DV: Ranking of Refugee Protection				
Human Rights Frame	0.057	4.32	0.429	3.94, 4.71
Violence against Women Frame	0.180	4.44	0.307	4.02, 4.86
Human Security Frame	0.124	4.38	0.359	4.01, 4.75
Humanitarian Frame	0.397	4.66	0.124	4.26, 5.06
Autonomy Frame	-0.045	4.22	0.455	3.81, 4.63
DV: Number of Refugees Should Increase or Stay the Same				
Human Rights Frame	0.170	0.84	0.031	0.75, 0.93
Violence against Women Frame	0.190	0.86	0.025	0.76, 0.96
Human Security Frame	0.050	0.72	0.309	0.60, 0.84
Humanitarian Frame	0.010	0.68	0.461	0.55, 0.81
Autonomy Frame	0.090	0.76	0.183	0.65, 0.88

Note: Estimated treatment effects represent differences in mean scores relative to the control group. Source: Data from survey experiments.

The last dependent variable represents a more specific measure of support for refugee protection by explicitly asking respondents whether the number of refugees permitted to enter their country should decrease, stay about the same, or increase. To further distinguish between those who believe that refugee protection policy should become more stringent relative to those who do not, this variable was recoded such that zero indicates decrease, whereas 1 indicates no change or increase. Table 3 presents differences in mean ratings of support across the five treatments, which again are considered relative to the control group, whose mean level of support is 0.67.

Although there is no evidence of a statistically significant effect of

framing across all treatments, two treatment groups are statistically significant, which indicates support for specific framing effects. More specifically, respondents who are exposed to the human rights frame and the VAW frame show increased support for refugee protection policy relative to the control group. Expressed as a proportion, among those individuals exposed to the human rights frame, roughly 84 percent favor either maintaining current numbers or increasing the number of refugees admitted into the country, compared to roughly 67 percent in the control group. The effect is slightly greater for those exposed to the VAW frame. Among those respondents, 86 percent favor maintaining current numbers or increasing the number of refugees allowed into the country. Overall, these findings provide some support for hypotheses 1 and 2.

In sum, the strongest frames among those tested are the human rights frame and the VAW frame. This is consistent with the literature that highlights these frames as particularly powerful, as they are based on strong and widely accepted norms. By contrast, these experiments do not find evidence that framing refugee protection as a matter of human security, humanitarianism, or autonomy alters support for refugee protection or perceptions of its importance as a policy issue. Still, these null findings do not necessarily indicate that these issue frames have no effect. In other words, the inability to reject the null hypotheses of no treatment effects only indicates that we cannot conclude that there are, in fact, treatment effects.

It cannot definitively conclude that there are no effects (Gill 1999).

Conclusion

Using survey experiments, this exploratory analysis finds that only two of the five issue frames tested significantly alter public support for the protection of refugees in France and Germany, and only when public support is measured by specifically asking about admitting refugees into the country rather than more general issue "importance" measures. The two frames that produce treatment effects (human rights and VAW) are notable in that their underlying norms are widely considered to be powerful and influential (Raymond et al. 2014; Weldon 2006; Weldon and Raymond 2013). Many human rights norms, for instance, have been found to be compelling across many individuals and societies (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In addition, VAW norms have "undisputedly" become a central aspect of women's rights and a "core dimension of human rights" (Raymond et al. 2014, 206). These findings complement other research that finds that the strength of the norm underlying a particular policy matters in terms of predicting the overall stability of that policy (Raymond 2016). Experimental public opinion studies such as this can be used to determine the relative influence of different norms as applied to a given policy issue, and policy designers can use this type of information to create policies that are more resistant to sudden change (Raymond 2016).

Each of the frames discussed the issue of refugee protection in global terms. Although the global level is most fitting for describing the issue, past research suggests that an issue risks becoming seen as a psychologically abstract event when placed in a geographically distant context (Singh and Swanson 2017). As it is more difficult for individuals to evaluate and make decisions about psychologically abstract concepts as opposed to more concrete concepts (Liberman et al. 2007; Trope and Liberman 2003), the global level of the treatment frames could diminish the level of importance individuals assign to refugee protection policy. Several studies examining other policies suggest that local-level frames may have particularly strong effects (Wiest et al. 2015; Hornsey et al. 2016; Spence et al. 2012). Thus, one area for future research is to create and test localized frames applied to the issue of refugee protection.

Recent research has shown that Europeans hold more tolerant attitudes toward the protection of refugees and asylum seekers than many politicians and the media traditionally assume, and that these views tend to be quite similar across European countries (Jeannet et al. 2019). Hochschild and Einstein (2015) underscore how misinformation about public opinion and public policy preferences can produce bad policies. For advocates who seek to induce public concern about refugee protection by "repackaging" the issue, the results of this study are potentially encouraging if strong and widely supported norms are used as the basis of framing. Individuals' support for refugee protection policy is not as rigid as is often assumed when the issue is portrayed as a matter of human rights or VAW. Advocates seeking to alter individuals' beliefs are thus likely to find some utility in issue framing supported by these widely accepted and influential norms.

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Declaration of Interest Statement

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Survey Questions

Should the number of refugees allowed to enter your country decrease, stay about the same, or increase?

1=Decrease

2=Stay about the same

3=Increase

As a policy issue, how important is the protection of refugees, where 0 means not important at all and 10 means very important?

(Not important at all)   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   (Extremely important)

Rank the following policy issues in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important):

Listed in alphabetical order:

_____   Climate change
_____   Democratization
_____   Global public health
_____   International economic policy
_____   Protection of refugees
_____   Spread of nuclear weapons
_____   Terrorism

What is your gender?

1=Female
2=Male
3=Non-binary
4=Prefer not to say

What is your age?

[drop-down menu indicating 19 through 100]
101=Prefer not to say

What is your highest level of education completed?

1=Some high school

2=High school

3=Some university

4=Trade/technical/vocational training

5=4 year university degree

6=Postgraduate degree (Master's degree, Doctorate degree, or PhD)

7=Prefer not to say

Research in decision-making shows that people prefer not to pay attention and minimize their effort as much as possible. If you are reading this question and have read all the other questions, please select the box marked "other." DO NOT select "refugee policy."

Thank you for participating and taking the time to read through the questions carefully!

1=Domestic Politics

2=Refugee Policy

3=The European Union

4=Other

Please enter your Worker ID to receive payment for completing this survey. (Workers can find their Worker ID on their Dashboard or in the upper left corner of the new Worker website.)