

The Meaning of Money Matters: Effects of Cash Policy Framings on Recipient Agency and Public Support

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Summary: We find that framings of cash-based welfare, including Universal Basic Income (UBI) policies, can affect both public support and recipient beliefs and behaviors. Small tweaks to framings may be a simple, cost-effective strategy both for advancing translation of UBI to policy and potentially for enhancing policy effectiveness on welfare and wellbeing.

Study 1: Effects of Cash Transfer Framings on Recipient Agency and Self-Investment:

Experimental Design: We conducted a lab-in-the-field experiment with 565 residents of urban settlements in Nairobi, Kenya in which we delivered small cash transfers with one of three framings of the giving organization’s aims and rationale:



(1) “Poverty Alleviation” organization aiming to relieve financial hardship and help the poor meet basic needs



(2) “Individual Empowerment” organization aiming to help individuals advance their personal goals and move toward financial independence



(3) “Community Empowerment” organization aiming to help individuals help others they care about and grow with their community

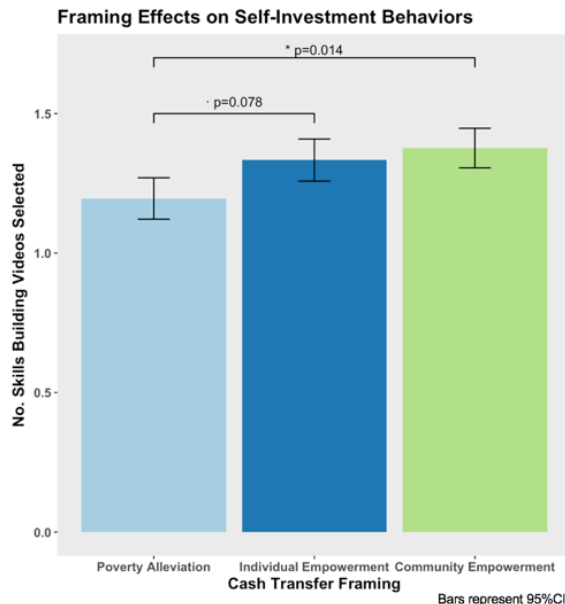
Preliminary Results:

+ Compared to framings that emphasize “Poverty Alleviation”, framings of cash transfers that emphasize “**Community Empowerment**” **significantly increase self-investment behaviors** (e.g. choosing to spend time watching skills-building over leisure videos), increase **perceived agency** (beliefs in one’s abilities), increase subjective social status, **and reduce perceived stigma**.

+ We find a similar but less significant pattern of results for the “Individual Empowerment” arm.

+ We find no significant differences in support of the organization or savings investments.

Future research should replicate these framings with recipients of cash transfer programs and evaluate economic, psychological, and social outcomes over time.



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Study 2: Effects of Values-Based Framings on Support for Universal Basic Income

Experimental Design: Using Amazon’s MTurk platform, we randomly assigned 628 American adults to read a framing that introduces UBI with policy details alone (control) or with one of two Conservative values: “Financial Freedom” policy (promoting autonomy and getting gov’t out of Americans’ decisions) or “Social Security for All” policy (promoting financial stability and protecting citizens from job losses).

Preliminary Results:

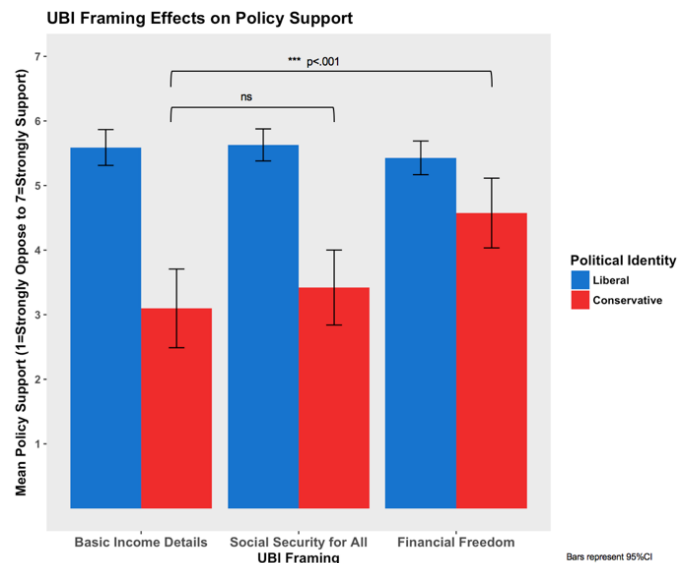
+ Conservatives oppose UBI upon reading policy details alone; however, adding the **value of Freedom/Autonomy as a policy objective shifts Conservatives from opposing to supporting UBI.**

+ Framing UBI as a means to promote Security does not significantly increase policy support among Conservatives.

+ The degree to which the message effectively met the values of Conservatives mediated effects on increased support.

+ **Liberals have high levels of UBI support, regardless of the policy framing.**

+ Among Conservatives, the Freedom/Autonomy appears to most effectively skirt welfare-related associations (e.g. views that the program would make people lazy vs. engaged).



These findings suggest that the most effective strategy for increasing overall public support would be to focus on meeting conservative values, particularly Freedom/Autonomy, and to avoid messages that prime welfare-related associations around laziness and work. These findings would need to be replicated with a representative population of voters before being applied at scale.