Political Psychology

ISPP International Society of Political Psychology

Political Psychology, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2023
doi: 10.1111/pops.12870

Core Values and Priming Effects in Electoral Campaigns

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Core values, which can be defined as abstract prescriptive beliefs about government and society, help ordinary citizens to reason about politics in a principled and efficacious manner. As such, core values have appeal for mass politics and representative democracy. To fulfill this role, core values should possess several characteristics. Chief among these are resistance to elite influence and trans-situationalism, that is, the ability to guide political evaluations across different contexts. Despite their importance for mass politics, it is unclear as to how well core values fulfill these criteria. I examine this here by testing whether core values can be systematically primed by electoral campaigns. That is, I test whether core values can be made, by political elites, to matter more in certain situations over others. I do this by using observational data from the 2012 and 2016 ANES, along with data from a nationally representative survey experiment, originally fielded in 2005. Overall, I find little evidence to suggest that electoral campaigns can prime citizens' core values. These findings have implications for our understanding of value systems, electoral campaigns, and public opinion.

KEY WORDS: core values, elections, public opinion

How do ordinary citizens, many of whom are only moderately informed, at best, about politics, form principled opinions about where they stand on the important political debates and issues of the day? In lieu of an overarching and coherently structured left–right ideology, the possession and use of which requires a good deal of political information (Converse, 2000; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), people can more easily evaluate a large number of political phenomena by relying on a smaller set of core values (Feldman, 2003; Goren, 2013).

Core values are, of course, not the only manner by which people can reason about politics. Indeed, there are numerous heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts, upon which people can rely (e.g., Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Lupia, 1994). Among the most common and powerful are cues from party leaders (e.g., Barber & Pope, 2019; Cohen, 2003; Lenz, 2009). This is not to say that citizens always unquestioningly follow party leaders (e.g., Boudreau & MacKenzie, 2014), but relying on such cues, even in part, means that people are following the lead of politicians who may or may not share their interests (e.g., Dancey & Sheagley, 2013; Kuklinski & Hurley, 1994). All else equal, representative democracy is arguably better served if people deduce political preferences from their own abstract principles rather than from where politicians they happen to like/dislike stand. Because core values reflect principled beliefs about the ideal society, rather than an affective social group identity, they are theoretically and normatively appealing for mass politics.

Published by Wiley Periodicals, LLC., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, and PO Box 378 Carlton South, 3053 Victoria, Australia

In order for core values, defined here as "abstract, prescriptive beliefs about humanity, society, and public affairs" (Goren, 2005, p. 881), to meaningfully shape political evaluations and serve as broad, principled guides to the sociopolitical world, they (values) should resist elite influences, particularly in the short term, and generally *not* be context dependent, that is, be able to shape political attitudes and behavior across a variety of situations and contexts. If core values do not meet these criteria, then they are conceptually indistinguishable from the various attitudes they purport to explain and would seem poor candidates to occupy a central place in mass belief systems. Indeed, Jacoby (2006, p. 706) notes that "a critical distinguishing feature of values, at least as they are traditionally conceived, is their applicability across different contexts." Ciuk (2011, p. 16) similarly says that "if values are at the roots of attitudes and behaviors—if they are the backstops from which attitudes emerge—then they cannot change with the situational context." This echoes Seligman and Katz (1996, p. 72), who state, "if values reorder themselves across situations, then we must ask what purpose the general value system serves."

Despite their importance for mass politics, it is unclear as to how well core values fulfill these criteria, that is, the extent to which they are context dependent and susceptible to elite influences. Some work has found that values do indeed fulfill these criteria, showing that they (values) are generally stable over time (Feldman, 1988; Goren, 2013; Searing et al., 2019) and resistant to external partisan forces (Evans & Neundorf, 2020). However, others have found that core values do not fully meet these criteria and that they (values) can be shaped by factors such as partisanship (Goren, 2005), campaign effects (McCann, 1997), cues from political elites (Goren et al., 2009), political discussion networks (Connors, 2020; Lupton et al., 2015), framing effects (Brewer, 2003; Grant & Rudolph, 2003; Nelson et al., 1997), and the impact of major events such as 9/11 (Branton et al., 2011; Ciuk, 2016).

In short, it is unclear as to how malleable and trans-situational core values are, that is, the extent to which they are susceptible to elite manipulation and the extent to which they are context dependent. Here, I provide an appropriate test of this by examining the ability of electoral campaigns to prime citizens' core values. I do this by using observational data from the 2012 and 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES) and data from a nationally representative survey experiment, originally fielded in 2005. Past work has clearly demonstrated that issue attitudes, performance evaluations, and various predispositions can all be "primed" by electoral campaigns (e.g., Bartels, 2006; Tesler, 2015), but it is unclear as to whether this also applies to core values.

Overall, I find little evidence that people's core values are susceptible to campaign-related priming effects. I specifically show that (1) the relationship between core values and vote choice did not significantly differ across the 2012 and 2016 U.S. presidential elections, and (2) people's broader value systems, (i.e., the extent to which they rank certain values as more important than others) did not significantly change when people were asked to think about how often presidential candidates (George W. Bush and John Kerry in 2004) emphasized a particular value. Collectively, these findings show that core values, unlike the various issue attitudes they purport to explain, appear to resist campaign-related priming effects, a common form of elite political influence. Overall, these findings have important implications for our understanding of core values, electoral campaigns, and public opinion.[1]

[1]I use the terms *core values* and *values* interchangeably throughout the article.

Campaigns, Priming, and Core Values

Politicians and media elites have considerable ability to shape ordinary citizens' attitudes, perceptions, and predispositions, something that often occurs over the course of electoral campaigns. Whereas fundamentals such as economic growth typically have a sizable impact on electoral outcomes, campaign rhetoric and the issues and events that garner media coverage can matter as well (e.g., Erikson & Wlezien, 2012; Hillygus & Shields, 2009; Vavreck, 2009). As per Bartels (2006, p. 84), "one familiar and theoretically plausible story about how campaigns matter is that they remind prospective voters of the electoral relevance of pre-existing political attitudes and perceptions." This reflects a psychological process called priming, which can be defined as "changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations" (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63). Priming is commonplace during electoral campaigns (e.g., Bartels, 2006; Matthews, 2019; Tesler, 2015; but see Lenz, 2009), and the end result is that certain issue attitudes, predispositions, and perceptions are made to "matter more" that is, they more strongly shape people's subsequent electoral behavior.

Core values should, in theory, resist campaign effects such as priming. But, as previously discussed, past work has not provided clear evidence on this. Indeed, core values are conceptually distinct from the various issue attitudes they purport to explain *because of* their supposed resistance to short-term elite manipulation and ability to guide political evaluations across different contexts. However, if core values are susceptible to campaign-related priming effects, that is, if they can be made to "matter more" (or less) depending on, for example, political candidates' rhetoric, then they are not conceptually distinct from issue attitudes and would seem poor candidates to serve as broad evaluative guides to the sociopolitical world. However, if core values resist campaign-related effects, this bolsters their ability to serve as a central organizing element in mass belief systems that help ordinary citizens to engage in efficacious and principled political reasoning.

Core values have been shown to shape voting behavior (e.g., Feldman, 1988; Goren, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2010), both over time and across countries, but it is unclear as to whether certain values can be made, as a result of candidate rhetoric, to matter more or less than other values. If core values can be manipulated in such a manner, then this would call into question their central place in mass belief systems and their ability to serve as an evaluative guide to the sociopolitical world. In the following sections, I specifically test, using both observational and experimental research designs, whether electoral campaigns have the ability to prime citizens' core values, that is, to make certain values matter more than others.[2]

Data and Methods

I use a combination of observational and experimental data from the United States to test my hypothesis regarding core values' susceptibility to campaign-related priming effects. This approach helps ensure that my analyses possess both internal and external validity. The observational data come from the 2012 and 2016 American National Election Studies (ANES). The experimental data come from a nationally representative survey that was fielded in June 2005 through the Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS). In the following sections, I describe the data, designs, and results from these analyses.

[2]This is not to say that core values can never be altered. Indeed, major events such as a terrorist attack or deadly pandemic could presumably make values relating to security and order matter more than, for example, values relating to equality and liberty. But short-term variation in candidate rhetoric (e.g., a greater emphasis on issues regarding taxes relative to issues regarding guns) should, in theory, lack the ability to manipulate people's supposedly foundational core values.

Observational Evidence

My observational analyses use pooled cross-sectional data from the 2012 and 2016 ANES. I opt to test my hypothesis (regarding core values' susceptibility to campaign-related priming effects) using these 2012 and 2016 data because of how candidate rhetoric and the broad themes that gained traction differed across these elections, that is, in a manner that could theoretically prime/activate certain values over others.[3]

I argue that the 2012 Barack Obama–Mitt Romney contest centered *more* on economic issues and class warfare and less on American national identity and threats to the existing social order than did the 2016 Hillary Clinton–Donald Trump contest (Sides et al., 2019; Sides & Vavreck, 2015).[4] This is not to say that Clinton (or Trump) neglected economic issues in 2016. But Trump's bombastic "Make America Great Again" campaign—which began by calling some Mexican immigrants "rapists" and later advocated for a massive border wall and Muslim ban in addition to his staunch support for police officers over the nascent Black Lives Matter movement—emphasized the threats immigrants and racial/ethnic minorities posed to the (majority-White) native-born population. This was part of a broader campaign that hearkened back to the days of a less culturally diverse country. Voluminous media coverage and Clinton's engagement with Trump on these terms, via her "Stronger Together" campaign slogan, meant that economic issues simply did not play as prominent a role as they did four years prior. In contrast, the 2012 election focused more on the size and scope of government and class warfare, as evidenced by the Obama campaign's efforts to define Mitt Romney as a "plutocrat." Moreover, Romney's selection of Paul Ryan as his running mate signaled an endorsement of the Ryan budget, a conservative economic vision that would drastically cut public spending and curtail the federal government's ability to mitigate economic and social inequities between the haves and have-nots.[5]

In short, the 2012 and 2016 elections represent a case where, if core values are susceptible to campaign-related priming effects, we should expect to observe such effects. In other words, given the stark differences in the issues and themes that these campaigns emphasized, 2012 and 2016 represent, among real-world U.S. presidential elections, a "most likely case" for value priming. However, if we do not observe such effects in this pair of real-world elections, then it seems unlikely that ordinary elections are capable of priming/manipulating citizens' core values. If core values are susceptible to priming effects, then their influences on people's voting behavior would be likely to differ across these two contests. Specifically, we should expect that egalitarianism, a stronger determinant of economic issue attitudes than of "culture war" and national identity issues, to matter more, that is, have a stronger relationship with vote choice in 2012 than in 2016.[6]

[3]The purpose of this article is not to test whether the relationship between core values and vote choice differs over time or across all elections. Indeed, past work has shown, using ANES data from 1988 to 2008, that core values consistently and meaningfully shape voting behavior (Goren, 2013). Here, I am simply seeking to leverage two vastly different elections (in terms of issue emphasis and candidate rhetoric) to test whether core values can be made to matter more or less for citizens' voting behavior.

[4]There were dozens of important issues and events during these two campaigns. My objective here is not to highlight all of these, but simply to make the case that economics were *more* relevant in 2012 than 2016.

[5]These illustrative examples are drawn from Sides and Vavreck (2015, Chapters 5–6) and Sides et al. (2019, Chapters 4–5) for 2012 and 2016, respectively.

[6]Though I cannot definitively show all the ways in which the 2012 and 2016 U.S. presidential elections differed, I hope that the totality of evidence presented here can convince an otherwise skeptical reader that these two campaigns (Obama–Romney vs. Clinton–Trump) differed in meaningful ways and that such differences are capable of priming relevant issue attitudes, but not their theoretically antecedent core values.

My dependent variable is self-reported vote choice for president. This is coded "0" if a respondent voted for the Republican nominee (Romney in 2012, Trump in 2016) and "1" if they voted for the Democratic nominee (Obama in 2012, Clinton in 2016). Given the dichotomous nature of my dependent variable, I use a probit model in each analysis.[7]

My key independent variables are two important values in American political culture. I specifically focus on *egalitarianism*, defined as "the extent to which one believes that social and economic equality is a problem deserving of government attention," and *traditionalism*, defined as "a belief in the virtue of traditional family and social arrangements and the view that alternative lifestyles foster moral decay" (Lupton & McKee, 2020, pp. 925–926).[8] Both egalitarianism ($\alpha = 0.688$) and traditionalism ($\alpha = 0.704$) are indices created from four survey items.[9] I rescale both of these variables to range from 0 to 1.[10] I also control for age (in years), gender (female vs. male), race/ethnicity (White, non-Hispanic vs. not), educational attainment (4-year college degree vs. not), partisanship (7 pt; strong Democrat → strong Republican), and ideological self-identification (7-pt; extremely liberal → extremely conservative; moderate/have not thought much about it are placed at the midpoint of the scale), accounting for a set of theoretically appropriate variables that can shape citizens' core values and voting behavior.[11]

In Table 1, I test whether the relationship between people's core values (egalitarianism and traditionalism) and presidential vote choice differs across the 2012 and 2016 elections. I do this by using pooled cross-sectional data from the Cumulative ANES. As previously discussed, these two elections differed greatly in the extent to which they emphasized economic issues and "class warfare," which should prime egalitarianism, versus the extent to which they emphasized "culture war" issues and threats to national identity, which should prime traditionalism.

To test this, I separately interact both core values, egalitarianism and traditionalism (both scaled to range 0–1), with an election-year dummy variable (0 = 2012; 1 = 2016).[12] If core values are susceptible to priming effects, then we should observe that the Egalitarianism × 2016

[7]In the Cumulative ANES (I used the September 10, 2019, version here), the weighted mean two-party vote for Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton (based on survey self-reports; VCF0704) was 53.6% and 52.9%, respectively. These numbers come close to both candidates' actual share of the national two-party vote, 52.0% and 51.1% for Obama and Clinton, respectively (https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/).

[8]Some argue that a focus on Shalom Schwartz's human values (e.g., Schwartz, 1994), specifically the values of self-transcendence and conservation (e.g., Goren et al., 2016), is superior to a focus on political values such as egalitarianism and traditionalism. This is due to human values' more abstract wording on surveys and their greater conceptual distance from the political attitudes they purport to explain. While these Schwartz values frequently appear on the European Social Survey (ESS), they rarely appear on U.S. surveys and are, unfortunately, not available for any of the empirical tests that I employ here.

[9]Egalitarianism and traditionalism are certainly not the only relevant values in American political culture. For instance, Feldman (1988) shows, using data from the 1984 ANES Pilot Study, that economic individualism also plays a role in structuring mass opinion and political evaluations. Unfortunately (at the time of this writing), the ANES no longer includes an appropriate battery of questions to measure this core value. In short, I focus on egalitarianism and traditionalism here for two main reasons. The first is because of their importance in American political culture. The second is that the relevant questions are consistently included on the ANES.

[10]Given this coding scheme, I expect egalitarianism ($M = 0.642$; $SD = 0.213$) to positively co-vary and traditionalism ($M = 0.546$; $SD = 0.232$) to negatively co-vary, respectively, with presidential vote choice (0 = Rep; 1 = Dem). See Supplemental Appendix S1 for greater detail on variable coding/creation.

[11]The results are very similar if I treat partisanship and ideological self-identification as categorical rather than 7-point continuous scales (ranging 0–1), whether I account for the ANES survey weights in each regression (I do so here), and if the ANES sample is restricted to in-person (non-Internet) respondents.

[12]The inclusion of election dummy variables (0 = 2012; 1 = 2016) controls for election-specific factors such as the objective state of the national economy and the incumbency status of the presidential candidates.

Table 1. Core Values and Voting Behavior, 2012 vs. 2016

	(1)	(2)
Egalitarianism	2.807*	1.495*
	(0.180)	(0.244)
Egalitarianism × 2016	−0.184	−0.229
	(0.267)	(0.364)
Traditionalism	−3.358*	−1.991*
	(0.165)	(0.247)
Traditionalism × 2016	−0.031	−0.333
	(0.245)	(0.339)
Additional controls	No	Yes
Observations	6,686	6,480
Pseudo R^2	0.354	0.670

Note: Dependent variables are self-reported vote for president (0 = Romney/Trump; 1 = Obama/Clinton). Probit coefficients with robust standard errors are in parentheses. Additional controls are for age, gender, race, education, partisanship, and ideological identification. These controls, the constant terms, and the election-year dummy constitutive terms are not displayed here. The full models are presented in Table S2.1.
Source: Cumulative ANES (2012 and 2016), survey weights applied.
*$p < .05$, two-tailed.

interaction term is *negative and statistically significant*, indicating that this core value was less strongly associated with the probability of voting for Hillary Clinton (over Donald Trump) in 2016 than for Barack Obama (over Mitt Romney) in 2012. We should also observe that the Traditionalism × 2016 interaction term is *negative and statistically significant*, indicating that this core value was more strongly associated with the probability of voting for Clinton (over Trump) in 2016 than for Obama (over Romney) in 2012.[13]

The results in Table 1 yield little evidence to suggest that values can be primed by electoral campaigns. This is demonstrated by the two interaction terms. Although both of the interaction terms are negatively signed, they are substantively small and are not statistically significant. If core values were susceptible to campaign-related priming effects, then we would expect to observe negative *and* statistically significant interaction terms. Figure 1 graphs the results from Table 1, showing that egalitarianism and traditionalism are substantively and significantly associated with vote choice, to an approximately equal degree, in both 2012 and 2016, a pair of elections that seemed likely candidates to prime core values.[14]

Robustness of Observational Evidence

Values vs. Issues

In Table 2, I compare how core values and issue positions differentially shaped voting behavior in 2012 and 2016. The results thus far (see Table 1 and Figure 1) suggest that core values seem able to resist elite influence, in the form of campaign-related priming effects. If my

[13]The reason why both interaction terms should be negative (if support is found for the "value priming" hypothesis) is because of how these two core values were coded. Higher scores on the egalitarianism scale indicate more liberal value stances, while higher scores on the traditionalism scale indicate more conservative values stances. See Appendix S1 for greater detail.
[14]In Table S2.4, I show that the results are similar when using candidate feeling thermometers (Democratic candidate/Republican candidate) as a dependent variable instead of vote choice.

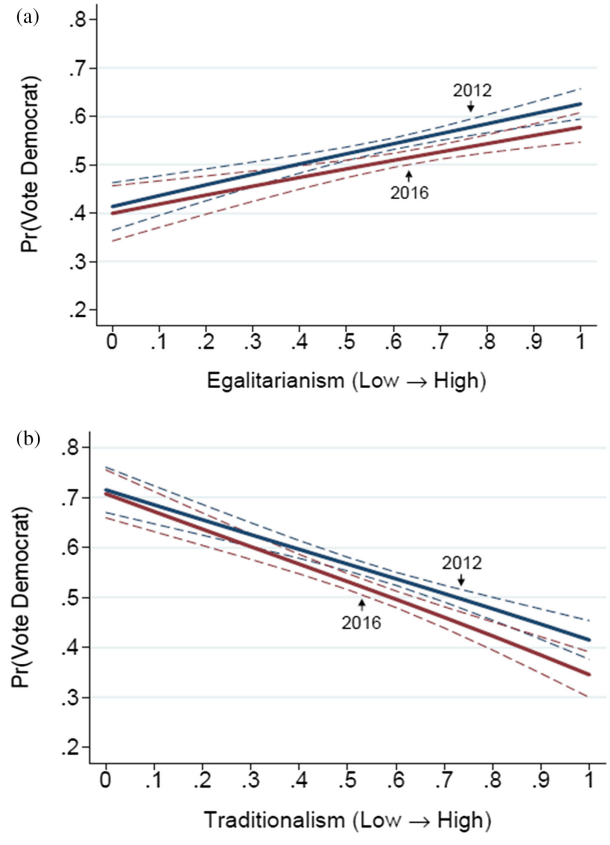

Figure 1. Core values and voting in the 2012 and 2016 U.S. presidential elections. The figure shows the predicted probability of voting for the Democratic presidential candidate (over the Republican) in 2012 (blue lines) and 2016 (red lines) across the observed range of (a) egalitarianism and (b) traditionalism, based on the probit regression models in column 2 of Table 1. All other variables are held constant at their observed values. Dashed lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

argument is correct, that some degree of priming occurred in these elections but did not extend to core values, then we should observe that the relationship between two issues (healthcare and immigration) and vote choice should differ across these two elections. I chose healthcare and immigration because of the differential emphasis placed on these issues in 2012 and 2016. In particular, the Obama–Romney contest in 2012 should have made healthcare attitudes more relevant to people's vote decision, whereas the Clinton-–Trump contest in 2016 should have raised the salience of immigration.[15]

The results in Table 2 not only show evidence of campaign-related priming effects, but also that this did not appear to extend to citizens' core values. As previously shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, egalitarianism and traditionalism both appeared to shape vote choice to a roughly equal

[15]Google Trends data show that the Affordable Care Act garnered more search attention in 2012 than 2016, whereas the opposite was true for immigration (greater in 2016 than in 2012). This keeps with anecdotes and journalistic accounts, as well as Sides et al. (2019, Chapter 8) regarding the comparatively less economic-centric nature of the 2016 campaign, relative to the 2012 campaign.

Table 2. Core Values, Issue Positions, and Voting Behavior, 2012 vs. 2016

	Core Values		Issue Positions	
Egalitarianism	2.807*	1.495*		
	(0.180)	(0.244)		
Egalitarianism × 2016	−0.184	−0.229		
	(0.267)	(0.364)		
Traditionalism	−3.358*	−1.991*		
	(0.165)	(0.247)		
Traditionalism × 2016	−0.031	−0.333		
	(0.245)	(0.339)		
Healthcare			2.731*	1.331*
			(0.125)	(0.174)
Healthcare × 2016			−0.759*	−0.903*
			(0.176)	(0.248)
Immigration			0.885*	0.657*
			(0.131)	(0.172)
Immigration × 2016			1.272*	0.812*
			(0.211)	(0.300)
Additional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	6,686	6,480	6,213	6,025
Pseudo R^2	0.354	0.670	0.312	0.661

Note: Dependent variables are self-reported vote for president (0 = Romney/Trump; 1 = Obama/Clinton). Probit coefficients with robust standard errors are in parentheses. Additional controls are for age, gender, race, education, partisanship, and ideological identification. These controls, the constant terms, and the election-year dummy constitutive terms are not displayed here. The full models are presented in Table S2.2.
Source: Cumulative ANES (2012 and 2016), survey weights applied.
*$p < .05$, two-tailed.

degree in 2012 and 2016 (as evidenced by the nonsignificant interaction terms). In contrast, the results in Table 2 show that attitudes toward healthcare policy (strongly favor private health insurance → strongly favor a universal government health plan) mattered significantly more in 2012 than in 2016 (as evidenced by the negative and significant interaction terms), whereas attitudes toward immigration policy (greatly decrease immigration levels → greatly increase immigration levels) mattered significantly more in 2016 than in 2012 (as evidenced by the positive and significant interaction terms). In short, there appears to be something unique about core values, in contrast to the political issues they purport to explain, that makes them resistant to campaign-related priming effects.

Heterogeneity by Political Engagement

In Table 3, I consider the possible moderating role of political engagement. It could be the case that the main results (in Table 1) mask important heterogeneity. Specifically, it is possible that the statistically nonsignificant results are being driven by inattentive and uninformed respondents failing to pick up on campaign rhetoric and thus failing to make the relevant connection between their values and subsequent political evaluations (Goren et al., 2022; Zaller, 2012). In other words, it is possible that core values are susceptible to campaign-related priming effects, but only among the most politically attentive respondents. Alternatively, it may be the case that such priming effects only manifest among less politically engaged citizens, the reason being that these individuals have weaker attitudes toward core values (Kalmoe, 2020) and less coherently structured value systems (Jacoby, 2006). As such, core values may be susceptible to

Table 3. Core Values, Election Interest, and Voting Behavior, 2012 vs. 2016

	Low/Average Interest		High Interest	
Egalitarianism	2.915*	1.655*	2.762*	1.398*
	(0.258)	(0.315)	(0.250)	(0.361)
Egalitarianism × 2016	−0.214	−0.370	−0.197	−0.169
	(0.409)	(0.521)	(0.354)	(0.507)
Traditionalism	−3.109*	−2.005*	−3.602*	−1.991*
	(0.219)	(0.274)	(0.254)	(0.451)
Traditionalism × 2016	−0.151	−0.182	0.115	−0.499
	(0.363)	(0.460)	(0.343)	(0.527)
Additional controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	3,021	2,936	3,662	3,541
Pseudo R^2	0.289	0.598	0.414	0.737

Note: Dependent variables are self-reported vote for president (0 = Romney/Trump; 1 = Obama/Clinton). Probit coefficients with robust standard errors are in parentheses. Additional controls are for age, gender, race, partisanship, and ideological identification. These controls, the constant terms, and the election-year dummy constitutive terms are not displayed here. The full models are presented in Table S2.3.
Source: Cumulative ANES (2012 and 2016), survey weights applied.
*$p < .05$, two-tailed.

campaign-related priming effects, but only among a less informed/engaged subset of the mass public.

I test this in Table 3 by dividing the sample (2012 and 2016 ANES respondents) into two groups based on their self-reported interest in the elections. The first group (Low/Average Interest) consists of respondents who said they were "not much" or "somewhat" interested in the elections. The second group (High Interest) consists of those respondents who said they were "very much" interested in the elections. The results in Table 3 show that neither group's core values appeared to have been primed. This is evidenced in Table 3 by the nonsignificant interaction terms.

Experimental Evidence

I complement my observational analyses of the ANES with data from a nationally representative survey experiment, originally fielded online in June 2005 through the Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS).[16] I specifically use these data to test whether electoral campaigns' priming of a particular core value leads people to rank that value as more important, thus restructuring their broader value systems.[17]

This survey included an experimental design that randomly assigned respondents to think about how often the George W. Bush and John Kerry campaigns emphasized one of five particular values.[18] This permits me to test whether political candidates' emphasis of a specific value

[16]See http://www.tessexperiments.org/study/jacoby339 for additional information about this study, including the associated codebook. See Appendix S1 for a fuller description of the experimental design and data used here.
[17]This TESS sample roughly approximates the U.S. population. For example, 49.6% of respondents identify as female, 76.1% identify as White, non-Hispanic, 84.6% have at least a high school diploma, and the median age is 47.0. In the 2004 ANES, these numbers were 51.5%, 70.5%, 74.4%, and 46.5, respectively.
[18]One advantage of this survey experiment over the observational ANES data is that respondents were specifically asked to think about how much the Bush and Kerry campaigns emphasized one of five different values, instead of making the assumption, albeit a reasonable one I argue, that the Obama–Romney and Clinton–Trump contests emphasized different issues and themes associated with certain values over others.

makes people more likely to rank that particular value as important, relative to other values.[19] It is important to focus on individuals' rank-ordering of values (instead of how they separately rate different values) because the relationship between people's values and their subsequent political attitudes/evaluations is often the product of having to reconcile internal conflicts among competing values (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Feldman & Zaller, 1992).

The five values examined are Liberty, Equality, Economic Security, Morality, and Social Order. All respondents in this survey experiment were asked to rank-order a particular value against two others, constituting a triad (Ciuk & Jacoby, 2015). This was repeated until each of the five values had been pitted against two others. In short, there are 30 total triads examined, meaning that respondents were asked to rank each of the five aforementioned values in six different triads.[20]

Respondents received a score of "1" if they ranked the primed value as the most important (in a particular triad) and a score of "0" if they did not rank the primed value as the most important (ranking it as the least important or as neither the most nor least important). As such, the dependent variable I examine is the change in the probability (0 vs. 1) of ranking the primed value as the most important in a particular triad. The potential values that can be primed are Liberty, Equality, Economic Security, Morality, or Social Order.

The following sections contain a close paraphrase of the text that the approximately 400 respondents viewed *before* they were asked to rank-order each of the five values, as well as a close paraphrase of how these respondents were asked to rank-order different values *after* they were exposed to one of the value primes. These two sections ("Value Primes" and "Instructions for Rank-Ordering of Values") should help to better illustrate the design and logic of this survey experiment.

Value Primes

LIBERTY PRIME (N = 82). In the recent presidential election campaign, the candidates and parties both emphasized certain themes and ideas. We are interested in your feelings about the extent to which the candidates emphasized the idea of Liberty, or guaranteeing the widest possible freedom for everyone to act and think as they consider most appropriate. Please indicate how much you think the Bush campaign emphasized Liberty and how much you think the Kerry campaign emphasized Liberty.

EQUALITY PRIME (N = 79). In the recent presidential election campaign, the candidates and parties both emphasized certain themes and ideas. We are interested in your feelings about the extent to which the candidates emphasized the idea of Equality, or making sure that everybody has the same chance to get ahead in life. Please indicate how much you think the Bush campaign emphasized Equality and how much you think the Kerry campaign emphasized Equality.

ECONOMIC SECURITY PRIME (N = 83). In the recent presidential election campaign, the candidates and parties both emphasized certain themes and ideas. We are interested in your feelings about the extent to which the candidates emphasized the idea of Economic Security, or

[19]There are a total of 649 valid respondents in this TESS study. I restrict my analyses to the approximately 400 respondents who made up the five "value prime" groups examined here.

[20]For the value of Liberty, the five triads would be as follows: (1) Liberty vs. Economic Security vs. Equality, (2) Liberty vs. Economic Security vs. Morality, (3) Liberty vs. Equality vs. Morality, (4) Liberty vs. Equality vs. Social Order, (5) Liberty vs. Morality vs. Social Order. Each of the other four values (Equality, Economic Security, Morality, and Social Order) are included in analogous triads. Of interest is which value was experimentally primed and thus which value serves as the dependent variable (i.e., whether it is ranked as the most important or not).

guaranteeing a steady job and decent income to everyone. Please indicate how much you think the Bush campaign emphasized Economic Security and how much you think the Kerry campaign emphasized Economic Security.

MORALITY PRIME ($N = 80$). In the recent presidential election campaign, the candidates and parties both emphasized certain themes and ideas. We are interested in your feelings about the extent to which the candidates emphasized the idea of Morality, or people living according to the rules that constitute decent human behavior. Please indicate how much you think the Bush campaign emphasized Morality and how much you think the Kerry campaign emphasized Morality.

SOCIAL ORDER PRIME ($N = 82$). In the recent presidential election campaign, the candidates and parties both emphasized certain themes and ideas. We are interested in your feelings about the extent to which the candidates emphasized the idea of Social Order, or being able to live in a safe and peaceful society where the laws are respected and enforced. Please indicate how much you think the Bush campaign emphasized Social Order and how much you think the Kerry campaign emphasized Social Order.

Instructions for Rank-Ordering of Values

We'd like to ask you about some things that are important for our society, such as liberty, equality, economic security, morality, and social order. First, is what we mean by these ideas.

By LIBERTY we mean a guarantee of the widest freedom possible for everyone to act and think as they consider most appropriate.

By EQUALITY we mean narrowing the gap in wealth and power between the rich and the poor.

By ECONOMIC SECURITY we mean the guarantee of a steady job and a decent income.

By MORALITY we mean people living according to the rules that constitute decent human behavior.

By SOCIAL ORDER we mean being able to live in an orderly and peaceful society where the laws are respected and enforced.

All five of these ideas are important, but sometimes we have to choose between what is more important and what is less important. And, the specific choices we make sometimes depend upon the comparisons we have to make.

On the next few screens, we will show you these ideas in sets of three. For each set, please use the mouse to indicate the idea that you think is most important of the three, and also the idea that you think is least important of the three. In some cases, you might think all three of the ideas are very important, but please try to indicate the ones you think are most and least important if you had to choose between them.

If you absolutely cannot decide which ideas are most or least important, then just click the box at the bottom of the screen, and move on to the next set of three ideas.[21]

Experimental Results

I present results from this survey experiment in Figure 2. If core values are susceptible to campaign-related priming effects, then we should observe that people who saw a specific value

[21]The definition for Equality differed somewhat when respondents saw the value prime and when they read instructions for rank-ordering of values. I am not sure why this is the case. However, the general idea is still roughly the same. Furthermore, it is unclear how this affects (if at all) the main findings and conclusions.

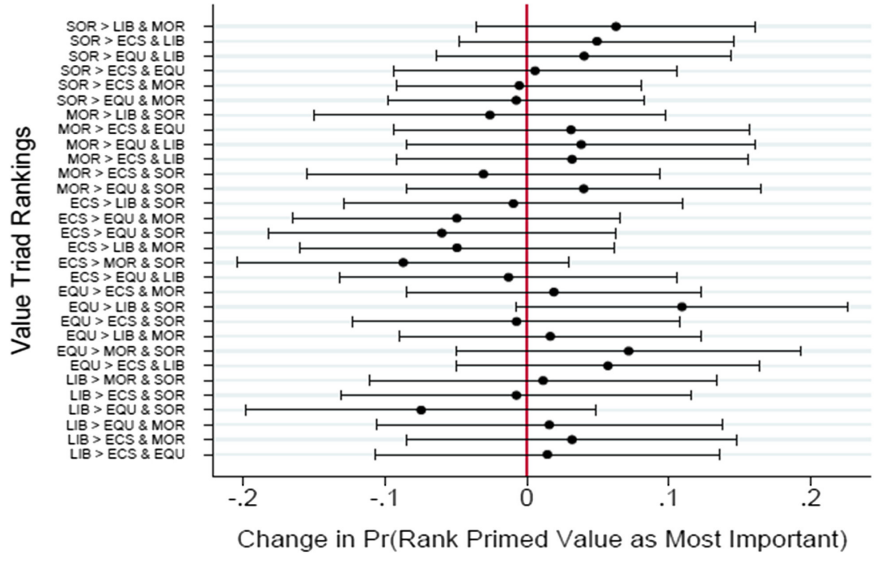

Figure 2. Campaign priming and rank-ordering of core values, 2005. This figure shows the effect of priming a particular value (the one to the left of the "greater than" sign on the *y*-axis), versus priming one of four other values, on the change in the probability of ranking that particular value as the most important in a triad. Point estimates are OLS coefficients; bars are 95% confidence intervals (robust standard errors, two-tailed test). LIB, Liberty; EQU, Equality; ECS, Economic Security; MOR, Morality; SOR, Social Order. *N* ranges from 390 to 397. The full models are presented in Tables S2.5–S2.9. *Source*: TESS survey, 2005.

prime would be more likely to rank that value as the most important (in a triad), compared to people who did not see that value prime. For instance, people who saw the Liberty prime (vs. those who saw either the Equality, Economic Security, Morality, or Social Order prime) should be more likely to rank Liberty as the most important value (in a triad) relative to people for whom the value of Liberty was not primed. In other words, if the coefficients (which represent the change in the probability of ranking the primed value as the most important in a particular triad) in Figure 2 are consistently positive and statistically significant, it would suggest that core values are susceptible to elite manipulation, in the form of campaign-related priming effects.

Overall, the results in Figure 2 yield little evidence to suggest that people reorder their value systems as a result of campaign-related priming effects. If core values were susceptible to such elite manipulation, then people should be more likely to rank the primed value as the most important. This would manifest in Figure 2 with consistently positive *and* statistically significant effects. This is not the case, however. Of the 30 coefficients in Figure 2, 17 are positively signed and 13 are negatively signed. Furthermore, only one coefficient is positive and statistically significant near the conventional level ($p < .10$), and just three others are positive and significant at $p < .30$, which is far beyond any reasonable standard of statistical significance. Overall, the results in Figure 2 suggest that people do not appear to restructure their broader value systems as a result of campaign-related priming effects.[22]

[22]There may be some concern about asking people to recall information from a campaign that took place more than 6 months earlier (fall 2004 vs. summer 2005). However, respondents were not being asked to recall intimate details, but simply to think briefly about broad themes that the Bush and Kerry campaigns emphasized, something that should not be unreasonable following what was, at the time, one of the most competitive, contentious, and polarizing campaigns in modern American politics.

Conclusion and Political Implications

Using both observational and experimental research designs, I conducted a test of whether citizens' core values resist campaign-related priming effects, a common form of elite influence. Overall, the results demonstrate, in line with theoretical understandings of values (e.g., Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992) but in contrast to some more recent findings (e.g., Connors, 2020; Goren et al., 2009), that core values can resist external influences, in the form of campaign-related priming effects. This does not mean that values are impermeable to external political forces (e.g., Evans & Neundorf, 2020; Goren, 2005), but these findings do suggest that they are, at a minimum, more resistant to such forces than the various issues they purport to explain. In short, these findings affirm core values' ability to guide political evaluations across different electoral contexts, providing ordinary citizens, many of whom are "innocent of ideology" (e.g., Converse, 2000; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017), with the ability to reason about politics in a principled and efficacious manner.

It is important to briefly discuss this article's limitations. One limitation is that the analyses use data from 21st-century U.S. presidential elections. Future work would do well to expand in scope by looking beyond the United States. Data permitting, expanding the universe of real-world elections beyond the two-party majoritarian U.S. context could help us to better understand when, if ever, core values are susceptible to campaign-related priming effects. It is possible that elections taking place during and/or in the immediate aftermath of a major crisis, such as a terrorist attack, deadly pandemic, or natural disaster, could prime certain core values over others. This is, of course, an empirical question that, data permitting, merits proper testing. A second limitation is a focus on a subset of the universe of potential values (see, e.g., Inglehart, 1981; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994). Indeed, there is no universally agreed-upon way to measure people's value orientations, and it is possible that different measurement strategies would yield different results. Again, this is an empirical question that merits further theorizing and testing. A third limitation is that I did not examine issue attitudes/policy preferences as a dependent variable. Future work would do well to further examine whether the relationship between core values and issue attitudes/policy preferences is context dependent, that is, conditional on question wording or the target group under consideration (Grant & Rudolph, 2003; Jacoby, 2006). Finally, my data cannot test whether people's value systems (i.e., their rank-ordering of/attitudes toward different values) change over the course of an electoral campaign and then "return to normal" after the election has concluded. Future work could potentially leverage panel data (if appropriate data exist) to explore this.

Future work can, and should, provide further tests of the value priming hypothesis. One particularly strong test, which I was unable to employ here owing to data limitations, would use panel data that span numerous elections. Such a design would ideally measure citizens' value orientations prior to their first election (t1) and then measure whether the relationship between values (measured at t1) and vote choice/candidate evaluations changed across different elections (e.g., measured at t2, t3, and t4). It would also be valuable to employ a fictional candidate experiment that randomizes both value and issue emphasis and then asks people about their vote intentions and/or candidate evaluations.

In line with work that paints a relatively optimistic picture of mass politics (e.g., Popkin, 1994; Sniderman, 2017), but in contrast to others who take a more pessimistic view (e.g., Achen & Bartels, 2016; Lodge & Taber, 2013), my findings portray the mass public in a more positive light. I do not wish to claim that electoral campaigns are irrelevant; indeed, they matter in

numerous ways (Jacobson, 2015). I also do not dismiss the ability of political elites to influence the masses (e.g., Lenz, 2012), nor do I claim that ordinary citizens are sophisticated ideologues (e.g., Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). Overall, my findings buttress the utility of core values, suggesting that they are able to resist a common form of elite influence and thus help ordinary citizens make principled political evaluations across contexts (Feldman, 2003; Goren, 2013), something that bodes well for representative democracy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Appendix S1. Information on Variable Coding for the ANES (Observational Analyses) and the TESS Survey (Experimental Analyses)

Appendix S2. Various Models (See Tables S2.1–S2.3 and S2.5–S2.9) Associated With Different Tables (1–3) and Figures (1 and 2) in the Main Article Along With 2012/2016 ANES Regression Models That Use Candidate Feeling Thermometer Ratings as an Alternative Dependent Variable (Table S2.4)

Table S2.1. Core Values and Voting Behavior, 2012 vs. 2016

Table S2.2. Core Values, Issue Attitudes, and Voting Behavior, 2012 vs. 2016

Table S2.3. Core Values and Voting Behavior by Interest in the Elections, 2012 vs. 2016

Table S2.4. Core Values and Voting Behavior (Vote Choice vs. Candidate Affect), 2012 vs. 2016

Table S2.5. Effect of Liberty Prime on Value Triad Rankings, 2005

Table S2.6. Effect of Equality Prime on Value Triad Rankings, 2005

Table S2.7. Effect of Economic Security Prime on Value Triad Rankings, 2005

Table S2.8. Effect of Morality Prime on Value Triad Rankings, 2005

Table S2.9. Effect of Social Order Prime on Value Triad Rankings, 2005