

**MORAL REFRAMING OF A UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME POLICY MITIGATES  
BOTH WELFARE-RELATED PREJUDICE AND PARTISANSHIP AMONG U.S.  
CONSERVATIVES**

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**Abstract (Word Count: 250)**

Inequality and deep poverty have risen sharply in the US since the 1990s. Simultaneously, cash-based welfare policies have frayed, support for government assistance has fallen among the political right, and prejudice against recipients of welfare has remained high. Yet, in recent years a new cash-based policy called Universal Basic Income (UBI) has been proposed, which would give all citizens cash sufficient to meet basic needs with no strings attached. We hypothesized that the potential of UBI to mitigate the partisanship and prejudice that define the existing welfare paradigm in the US critically depend on the narratives attached to it. Indeed, across three online experiments with US adults (total  $N=1,888$ ), we found that the novel policy features of UBI were not sufficient to achieve bipartisan support for the policy or overcome negative stereotyping of its recipients. Building on the moral reframing and culture match literatures, we find that only when UBI was couched in terms of the more conservative value of financial freedom and achieved moral fit, or perceived alignment of the policy with one's values, was opposition from conservatives reduced (meta-analytic effect on support:  $d=0.36$  [95% CI: 0.27 to 0.46]). Extending these literatures, we further find that this values-aligned policy narrative mitigated prejudice among conservatives, reducing negative welfare-related stereotyping of policy recipients (meta-analytic effect  $d=-0.27$  [95% CI: -0.38 to -0.16]), while increasing affiliation with them. Together, these findings point to moral reframing as a promising intervention at the institutional level for bridging intergroup divides of both political partisanship and prejudice.

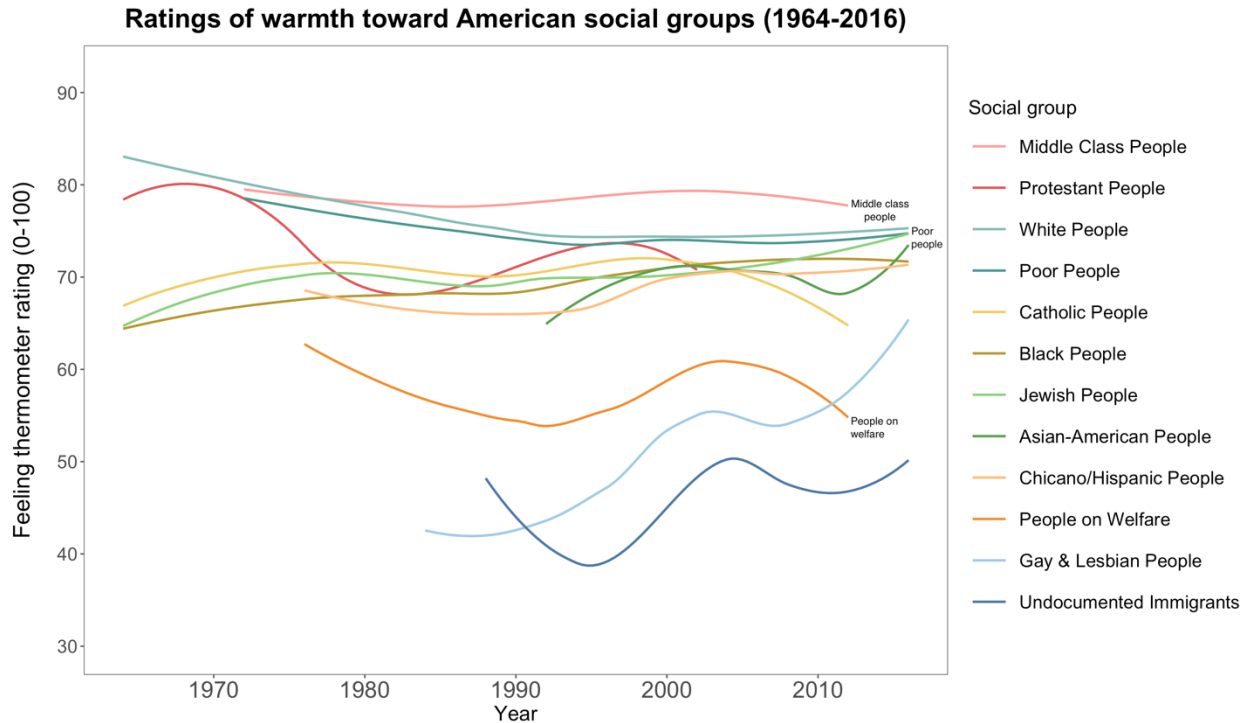
**Keywords:** narratives, moral reframing, inequality, prejudice, partisanship

## 1. Introduction

Both economic inequality and deep poverty have risen sharply in the United States since the 1990s (Edin & Shaefer, 2016; Saez & Zucman, 2016). Over the same period, cash-based welfare policies for the poorest citizens in the US have declined (Edin & Shaefer, 2016; Shaefer et al., 2019), as has public support for such policies among the political right (AP-NORC Center, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2017). Yet in recent years, a new cash-based policy called Universal Basic Income (UBI) has been gaining traction in policy circles worldwide, arising from a robust and growing evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfers in alleviating poverty and enhancing well-being (Bastagli et al., 2019; Haushofer & Shapiro, 2016; Marinescu, 2018). In contrast to existing welfare policies, UBI policies are universal, giving all citizens regular cash payments sufficient to meet basic needs, and unconditional, giving cash with no strings attached (Bidadanure, 2019). Because of these novel features, UBI presents a potential opportunity to overcome the existing welfare paradigm in the United States, which is plagued by partisan opposition and prejudice. However, we theorized that these features are not sufficient to generate bipartisan support for UBI; instead, the narratives attached to UBI will also be critical.

Many factors may contribute to public opposition to cash-based welfare policies, including doubts about their effectiveness, zero-sum beliefs, and fairness concerns (see SM Fig. S1). One important determinant is prejudicial ideas about welfare recipients that were cultivated in American society, particularly in conservative politics and culture. These gained an iron grip on the American psyche with the trope of the freeloading ‘welfare queen’ (Gilens, 2000; Henry et al., 2004; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006). Today, welfare recipients are one of the most negatively viewed groups in America (see Fig. 1), with recipients often viewed as lazy, dependent, and irresponsible and with welfare blamed for creating a culture of dependence

(Banerjee et al., 2017; Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017; Henry et al., 2004; Soss et al., 2011). We theorized that UBI and UBI recipients are vulnerable to these same representations yet that this is not inevitable.



**Fig. 1.** Secondary analysis of data from the American National Election Study (ANES) - Cumulative: Feeling thermometer ratings towards select social groups in the US between 1964 and 2016 (N = 59,944)

Feeling thermometer questions ask respondents to rate their feelings toward certain groups, particularly how cold / unfavorable they feel to how warm / favorable they feel (0-100 degrees). The social group labels were altered from the original ANES survey in line with principles of inclusive language and are ordered according to their overall averages over time, given available data. Feeling thermometer ratings toward people on welfare were not collected in the 2016 wave. The data and original materials were retrieved from Survey Documentation and Analysis (SDA) archives (American National Election Studies, 2021).

Policies are expressions of institutions and can communicate narratives about which values matter in society and the characteristics of certain social groups (Feinberg & Willer, 2019; Shnabel et al., 2016; Tankard & Paluck, 2017; Thomas et al., 2020; Walton & Brady, 2020). For instance, the name of the main cash welfare program in the US, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) implies that assistance should be temporary, because people may become dependent, and highlights recipients' neediness (Cooley et al., 2019; Stuber & Kronebusch,

2004; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006; Sykes et al., 2015). In this way, such institutional narratives can perpetuate prejudicial views, including negative stereotypes, of recipients of public assistance. While most interventions take a direct approach to prejudice-reduction, by targeting individuals and their personal perceptions of outgroup members (Paluck et al., 2021), we view the prejudice directed against recipients of public assistance as, at least in part, derived from this larger narrative. Therefore, we assess the effect of policy narratives, as an institutional-level intervention (Hamedani & Markus, 2019; Thomas et al., 2020).

The primary narrative we test emphasizes the opportunity for UBI to expand individual financial freedom and thus aligning a UBI policy narrative with a conservative core value. In doing so, we draw on a technique called ‘moral reframing’ (Feinberg & Willer, 2015, 2019). This literature as well as experimental research in cultural psychology finds that achieving moral fit, or alignment with values, can be a powerful motivational and persuasive force (Markus, 2016; Stephens et al., 2012). To date, the literature on moral reframing has focused predominantly on mitigating partisanship in policy support, finding that conveying a policy in ways that align with conservative or liberal moral foundations, respectively, increases support across the aisle (Feinberg & Willer, 2015, 2019; Graham et al., 2011). UBI is a policy that is particularly ripe for moral reframing and bipartisan support. Historically both conservative economist Dr. Milton Friedman and civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. argued for UBI-like policies on the basis of expanded freedoms (Foner, 2000; Hamedani, Markus, & Fu, 2013; Iyer et al., 2012). Yet liberals currently position UBI as a way to advance the liberal value of caring for and protecting the vulnerable, a value less endorsed by conservatives (Graham et al., 2009; Haidt, 2012).

Our goal was to (re)develop a narrative rooted in freedom for UBI that would both build bipartisan support and reduce prejudice against recipients. We were guided by Iyer et al. (2012) who showed that, while both liberals and conservatives highly endorse the value of liberty, or freedom, conservatives are particularly likely to endorse economic freedom, specifically from government interference, and liberals to endorse social or ‘lifestyle’ freedom. Consistent with the conservative form, Friedman argued that an advantage of cash-based assistance is to “avoid interference with personal freedom,” particularly from the government (Friedman, 1967). Here, we hypothesized that situating UBI as promoting the value of freedom (“helping individuals have greater autonomy in their decisions and in their lives”) would engender greater conservative, and thus bipartisan, support.

Extending the moral reframing literature, which, as noted, has focused on bipartisan support, our second hypothesis was that moral reframing would be an effective, indirect approach to prejudice reduction. We hypothesize that a freedom-based narrative of UBI would mitigate negative stereotyping about recipients and increase social affiliation with them through its selective focus on the values advanced by the policy. Though we do not distinguish among them here, several mechanisms are consistent with this hypothesis. First, a policy narrative provides an overarching way to understand a policy, its purpose, and its recipients. If this narrative focuses on enabling the pursuit of individual freedom, people may view policy recipients as pursuing individual freedom, which is valued—and prevent prevalent pejorative representations of recipients (e.g., “lazy”) from coming to mind. Second, embedding values in a policy message may serve as a values affirmation. Research in identity threat finds that affirming a person’s values can ease threats to self-adequacy and, subsequently, reduce stereotyping and outgroup derogation and increase ideological flexibility (Cohen et al., 2007; Fein & Spencer,

1997). In this way, moral reframing may make respondents more receptive to forming new beliefs and attitudes. Finally, people could infer that policy recipients share the value being advanced by the policy, facilitating a sense of a shared identity and social affiliation (Launay & Dunbar, 2015). Such feelings of closeness and shared identity have been shown to contribute to reductions in prejudicial attitudes and zero-sum beliefs towards outgroups (Davies et al., 2011; Esses et al., 2001; Shnabel et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2002).

These studies add to the social psychological literature in three primary ways. First, we bridge the moral reframing and cultural match literatures to the research on prejudice and stereotyping in psychology. Second, we reveal a means to mitigate prejudice against one of the most negatively viewed social groups in the US—welfare recipients. Third, we add to the prejudice reduction literature by testing a promising intervention at the institutional level, that of policy communications.

Experiment 1 compares two values-based policy messages on support for UBI and prejudicial policy beliefs among US liberals and conservatives. Experiment 2 replicates the effect of a freedom-based message on support for UBI among conservatives and examines negative stereotyping of recipients. It also compares this freedom-based message to a message that recasts the qualities of policy recipients more explicitly (“freedom plus”). Experiment 3 benchmarks impacts on views of UBI recipients to views of current welfare recipients and further explores mechanisms of the freedom-based message.

## 2. Experiment 1

With a sample of liberals and conservatives, Experiment 1 examined whether a message that represented UBI as advancing individual freedom would increase how much conservatives perceived the policy to fit with their values (*moral fit*), their *support for UBI*, and *stereotypical*

*policy beliefs*. We compared this “Financial Freedom” message—grounded in the conservative value of financial freedom—and a status quo “Social Security for All” message—grounded in the liberal value of care for the vulnerable—to a message that simply provided the policy details. This initial experiment was not pre-registered.

## *2.1. Methods and materials*

### *2.1.1. Participants*

We recruited US adults on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to understand policy views with a broad sample of Americans. The experiment was powered to detect at 80% (two-tailed test, alpha level of .05) a small to medium effect size of  $d=0.27$  between conditions, which was based on prior piloting. For this and subsequent studies, sample size was determined before any data collection. While this was a convenience sample, survey experiments conducted on MTurk tend to show similar results to those conducted with nationally representative samples (Mullinix et al., 2015). 642 participants completed the survey. To screen out low-quality data, participants who did not respond “Yes” to “In your honest opinion, should we use your data and responses?” were excluded ( $N=14$  total, by condition:  $N=5$  in freedom,  $N=3$  in security,  $N=6$  in control).<sup>1</sup>

The final sample included 628 consenting participants ( $M_{age}=35.2$  years; 46.7% female; 75.5% White, 8.3% Black, 7.5% Asian, 5.4% Hispanic, and 3.3% Other; 44.6% Bachelor’s degree or more education, 43.6% with some college, 11.8% with a high school degree or less); and modal (31.5%) annual household income of \$25,000-\$50,000) (see SM Table S1.1). Participants were 42.5% Democrat, 20.4% Republican, 32.5% Independent, and 4.6% Other. On a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 indicating ‘strongly liberal’ and 7 indicating ‘strongly conservative,’

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<sup>1</sup> See SM Section 1.2 for a discussion of survey attrition.



the sample skewed slightly liberal in political ideology ( $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=1.74$ ). Supporting the success of random assignment, we find no differences across conditions on these sociodemographic characteristics (see SM Table S1.1). All procedures for this and subsequent experiments were approved by the ethics board at Stanford University (Protocol No. 41430).

### *2.1.2. Procedure and manipulation*

Participants were randomly assigned to read about a UBI policy communicated in one of three ways: the control condition with objective policy details alone (“Basic Income”), or one of two values-based messages (“Financial Freedom” or “Social Security for All”). The objective policy details were held constant across all three conditions.

The “Basic Income” policy message (control) condition described the details of a basic income policy alone (“The ‘Basic Income’ policy would streamline many government programs and provide a single, efficient monthly payment to all citizens, regardless of employment status, sufficient to cover basic needs”).

The values-based messages included these policy details and additionally characterized how the policy would advance a particular value. The “Financial Freedom” message (“freedom message”) described how the policy could promote individual autonomy (“Freedom is an important value for Americans.... The goal of this ‘Financial Freedom’ policy is get the government out of deciding which services are available to people and instead, enable individuals to decide for themselves how to best meet their needs”).

The “Social Security for All” policy message (“security message”) communicated a narrative about protecting the vulnerable from harm by providing economic security in a changing economy (“Security is an important value for Americans... The goal of this ‘Social

Security for All’ program is to protect Americans and their families against financial shocks such as job losses”). SM Section 1.1 includes the full text for all policy messages.

### 2.1.3. Measures

*2.1.3.1. Manipulation and attention checks.* For the manipulation check, two independent research assistants coded responses to an open-ended question asked directly after the manipulation: “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not.” RAs coded for the presence or absence of mentions of freedom and security (see Table S1.5 for definition and examples). After five rounds of coding ( $kappa = .84$ ), each RA coded half of the remaining data. The attention check asked participants to select the correct eligibility criteria for being a recipient of the policy. Manipulation checks and attention checks are described in SM Section 1.6.

*2.1.3.2. Political ideology.* Political ideology was measured as the primary moderator of condition effects, in line with the moral reframing literature. It was an average of two items ( $1=Strongly liberal, 7=Strongly conservative$ : “Please indicate your political identity on social issues (e.g., abortion, gun rights, gay rights). I am \_\_\_ on social issues” and “Please indicate your political identity on economic issues (e.g., taxation, government spending). I am \_\_\_ on economic issues”; adapted from Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2017) and Feinberg and Willer (2015);  $r(626)=0.75, p<0.001$ ).

*2.1.3.3. Attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy.* The primary measure of *policy support* was assessed with a single item: “To what extent do you support or oppose [policy title]?” from  $1=Oppose a great deal$  to  $7=Support a great deal$ .

Building on inoculation theory within the persuasion literature (Compton & Pfau, 2016), we also tested the strength of participants’ support for the policy through the resilience of their

policy attitude change: whether participants would show ‘inoculation’ against (i.e., disagreement with) common counterarguments to UBI they may encounter in everyday life. For this *resistance to counterarguments* measure, we showed participants six counterarguments commonly levied against public assistance policies and asked them how much they disagree with those counterarguments (e.g., “Some argue that this policy would undermine American values of meritocracy and hard work by giving people unearned money,” 1=*Strongly disagree* to 7=*Strongly agree* with the argument, reverse-coded,  $\alpha=0.92$ ).

As an additional indicator of positive policy attitudes, we also assessed how much participants rejected versus endorsed zero-sum beliefs about the policy—that it would benefit only the least well off and at the expense of others (3 items, e.g., “This program would help many Americans, even those with good incomes,” reverse-coded, 1=*Strongly disagree* to 7=*Strongly agree*,  $\alpha=0.72$ ).

*2.1.3.4. Attitudes towards recipients.* We assessed how much participants endorsed stereotypical beliefs about how recipients would respond to the policy, specifically that recipients would become dependent on, as opposed to empowered by, cash welfare (*dependence beliefs*, 5 items, e.g., “A basic income program would promote laziness by giving people unearned money,” “People would probably spend the money from this program on the wrong things,” 1=*Strongly disagree* to 7=*Strongly agree*,  $\alpha=0.91$ ). These beliefs have been found to be associated with negative work ethic stereotypes about and dehumanization of welfare recipients (Cooley et al., 2019; Schroeder et al., 2017).

*2.1.3.5. Process variable.* As our primary process variable, we assessed *perceived moral fit*, or how much participants perceived the policy as being in alignment with their values (3

items assessing how much the policy is “consistent with your values,” “fair,” and “important,” 1=*Not at all* to 5=*Extremely*,  $\alpha=0.92$ ).

2.1.3.6. *Supplementary measures.* As supplementary measures, we assessed participants’ *desire to receive* the policy themselves; open-ended *supportive thoughts* about the policy, self-categorized as supportive or opposing; *perceived policy effectiveness*; and *supportive affect* (see SM Section 1.7).

For Experiments 1-3, we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions in the main text or SM, with the exception of a small number of variables designated *a priori* as exploratory within the study materials (Experiment 1) or pre-registration (Experiment 2), including Protestant Work Ethic, cultural independence, and empathic concern.

## 2.2. Results

### 2.2.1. Analytic strategy

For all outcomes, we conducted multiple regression analyses interacting message condition with political ideology. All analyses were conducted with the full sample using the software R (R Core Team, 2020). Analyses showed highly to marginally significant interactions between condition and political ideology on all dependent variables ( $ps < 0.10$ ), supporting simple slopes analyses. These were driven by significant interactions with the freedom condition (and not the security condition) compared to the control ( $ps < 0.10$ ) (see SM Table S1.2). We report simple slopes analyses for conservatives (at the value of 6=*Moderately conservative*) and for liberals (at the value of 2=*Moderately liberal*). While simple slopes analyses represent predicted values, we refer to these results as mean effects for ‘conservatives’ and for ‘liberals’ for simplicity of reporting. We report multiple-hypothesis corrected p-values, using Benjamini-Hochberg procedure (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995), computed for all condition comparisons

within each analysis category (interaction effects, conservative simple effects, liberal simple effects) on all main outcome variables (see SM Tables S1.2-1.4).

### *2.2.2. Manipulation check*

When we coded the responses to the question “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not,” we found that, respectively, the freedom condition increased references to freedom-related themes and the security condition increased references to security-related themes compared to the control. We also found that the vast majority of participants passed the attention check and retained all participants in analyses (see SM Section 1.6 for details on both outcomes).

### *2.2.3. Attitudes toward the policy*

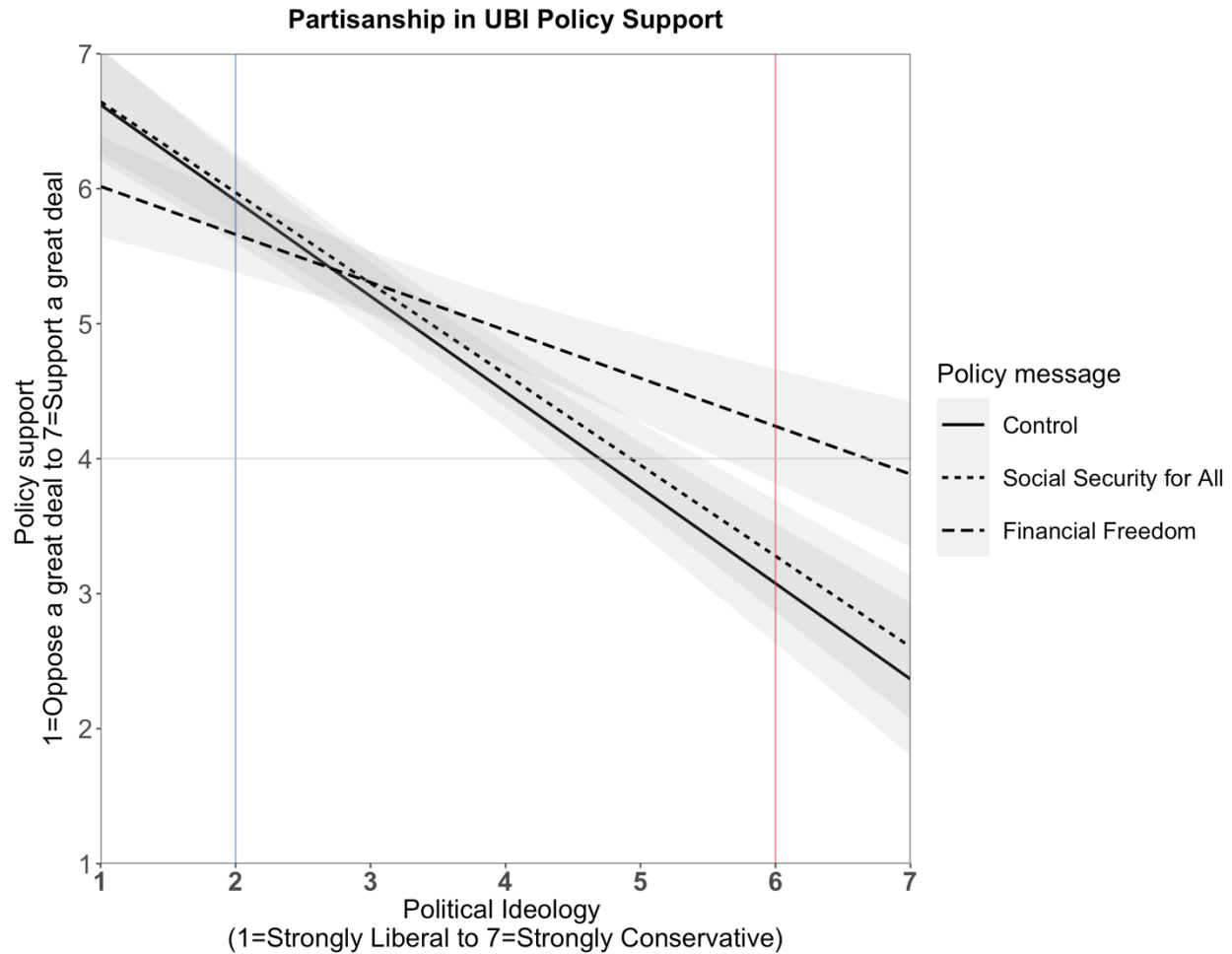
As hypothesized, on the primary measure of support, there was an interaction between political ideology and condition,  $F(2,622)=8.41$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $\eta^2=.03$ , which was driven by an interaction between the freedom and control conditions,  $t(622)=3.69$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $d=0.30$  (see Fig. 2). By contrast, there was no interaction with the security versus control message,  $t(622)=0.37$ ,  $p=.827$ ,  $d=0.03$ .

Simple slopes analyses showed that the freedom message significantly increased support for UBI among conservatives, shifting the average from moderate opposition in the control condition ( $M=3.08$ ) to slightly above the scale midpoint in the freedom condition ( $M=4.24$ ),  $t(622)=3.78$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $d=0.30$ . The security message, which advanced liberal-leaning values, had no effect on policy support among conservatives ( $M=3.28$ ) relative to the control condition,  $t(622)=0.66$ ,  $p=.693$ ,  $d=0.05$ . In contrast to conservatives, liberals supported a basic income policy moderately to strongly in all three conditions, and neither message significantly differed

from the control condition ( $M_{Control}=5.91$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=5.66$ ),  $t(622)=-1.19$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=-0.10$ , ( $M_{Security}=5.97$ ),  $t(622)=0.28$ ,  $p=.902$ ,  $d=0.02$ .

Probing the robustness of support for UBI, we find that, for conservatives, the freedom message significantly increased their *resistance to counterarguments* against a UBI policy ( $M_{Control}=2.67$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=3.29$ ),  $t(622)=2.28$ ,  $p=.034$ ,  $d=0.18$ , while the security message had no effect ( $M=2.60$ ),  $t(622)=-0.26$ ,  $p=.897$ ,  $d=-0.02$  (see Fig. 3). In contrast, as with policy support, liberals did not differ by condition, showing similarly high levels of resistance to counterarguments across conditions ( $M_{Control}=5.06$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=4.90$ ),  $t(622)=-0.84$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=-0.07$ , ( $M_{Security}=4.80$ ),  $t(622)=-1.34$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=-0.11$ .

Conservatives reading the freedom message were also less likely to endorse zero-sum beliefs about UBI ( $M=3.51$ ) than those in the control condition ( $M=4.22$ ), that is, being less likely to see UBI as benefiting only the least well off,  $t(622)=-3.01$ ,  $p=.008$ ,  $d=-0.24$ . The security message showed no such effect ( $M=4.17$ ),  $t(622)=-0.21$ ,  $p=.897$ ,  $d=-0.02$ . Liberals again did not differ by condition, showing similarly low endorsement of zero-sum beliefs ( $M_{Control}=2.45$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=2.37$ ),  $t(622)=-0.47$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=-0.04$ , ( $M_{Security}=2.49$ ),  $t(622)=0.24$ ,  $p=.902$ ,  $d=0.02$ .



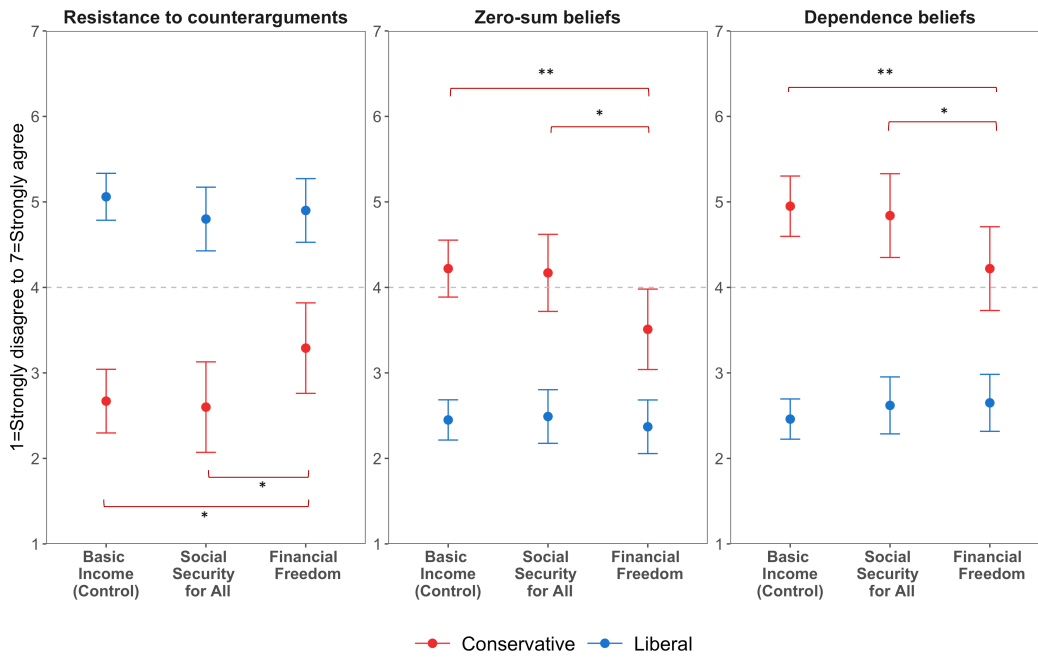
**Fig. 2** A UBI policy message grounded in financial freedom reduces partisanship in policy support

Note. This figure displays the experimental effects of two values-based policy messages, compared to policy details alone, on the relationship between political ideology and policy support. The lines are linear fits with 95% CI ribbons. Vertical lines indicate the values on political ideology of “moderately liberal” (2) and “moderately conservative” (6). The horizontal grey line indicates the scale midpoint “Neither oppose nor support.”

#### 2.2.4. Attitudes toward policy recipients

In addition to leading conservatives to view the policy more positively, the freedom condition also led conservatives to see recipients of the policy more positively. Compared to the control message ( $M=4.95$ ), conservatives reading the freedom message were less likely to

believe that recipients would become dependent on UBI ( $M=4.22$ ),  $t(622)=-2.96$ ,  $p=.008$ ,  $d=-0.24$ . The security message showed no such effect ( $M=4.84$ ),  $t(622)=-0.48$ ,  $p=.788$ ,  $d=-0.04$  (see Fig. 3). Liberals did not differ by condition, showing similarly low endorsement of dependence beliefs ( $M_{Control}=2.46$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=2.65$ ),  $t(622)=1.17$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=0.09$ , ( $M_{Security}=2.62$ ),  $t(622)=0.95$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=0.08$ .



**Fig. 3.** The effects of values-based UBI policy narratives on liberals’ and conservatives’ attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy and its recipients

Note. This graph shows the simple slope estimates at the points of 2 (“moderately liberal”) and 6 (“moderately conservative”) respectively on a scale from 1=Strongly liberal to 7=Strongly conservative. The horizontal dashed line represents the outcome scale midpoint. P values are corrected for multiple-hypothesis testing. Asterisks denote significance in the condition comparison (\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ ). Error bars are 95% CI.

#### 2.2.5. Process variable

As predicted, the freedom message increased the perceived moral fit of UBI among conservatives ( $M=3.08$ ) compared to the control condition ( $M=2.40$ ),  $t(622)=3.49$ ,  $p=.002$ ,



$d=0.28$ , while the security message had no such effect ( $M=2.41$ ),  $t(622)=0.05$ ,  $p=.960$ ,  $d=0.00$ .

By contrast, liberals' perceived moral fit was not affected, as they reported high moral fit, approaching ceiling, across all conditions ( $M_{Control}=4.13$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=4.04$ ),  $t(622)=-0.66$ ,  $p=.875$ ,  $d=-0.05$ , ( $M_{Security}=4.11$ ),  $t(622)=-0.11$ ,  $p=.916$ ,  $d=-0.01$ .

We examined whether a measure of moral fit was consistent with our theoretical pathway as a mediator of the effects of moral reframing on policy support. We ran a mediation model, with standardized outcome measures, using the 'mediation' package in R with 1000 bootstrapped simulations (Tingley et al., 2014). For this analysis, instead of conducting simple slopes analyses, we split the sample into self-identified conservatives (i.e., those whose average political ideology score was above the scale midpoint) and self-identified liberals (i.e., those whose average political ideology score was below the scale midpoint). The mediation analysis results were consistent with our hypothesis, showing a significant indirect effect of moral fit on the pathway between condition (0=control message, 1=financial freedom condition) and policy support (*Indirect effect*=1.05, 95% CI=[0.36, 1.74],  $p=0.004$ ) among conservatives and a non-significant indirect effect among liberals (*Indirect effect*=-0.05, 95% CI=[-0.38, 0.26],  $p=0.790$ ). We interpret the results of mediation analysis as correlational not causal. They illustrate the viability of one possible causal pathway.

#### 2.2.6. Supplementary measures.

On most supplementary measures, we found similar patterns of results such that conservatives showed more positive policy attitudes in the freedom compared to the control condition. The freedom condition, and not the security condition, increased conservatives' *desire to receive* the policy themselves, *supportive thoughts* towards the policy, and *perceived effectiveness* of the policy. Liberals' ratings were high on all these outcomes and did not show

condition differences. The measure of supportive affect did not show condition differences among either conservatives or liberals. See full details on these measures in SM Section 1.7.

### *2.3.1. Discussion*

In Experiment 1, representing basic income as a means to advance the value of freedom reduced partisan polarization in support for UBI by increasing support among conservatives. It also reduced how much conservatives endorsed stereotypical beliefs about UBI, specifically that recipients would become dependent on the policy. The freedom-based message increased conservatives' perceived moral fit with the policy while the security-based message showed no such effect, and mediation analyses supported moral fit as a possible mechanism by which the freedom message shifted conservatives' attitudes towards the policy. By contrast, liberals generally supported UBI and reported high moral fit with the policy, being near ceiling on this measure, regardless of message condition.

## **3. Experiment 2**

Experiment 2 was a pre-registered study with a larger sample of conservatives, the group showing the greatest opposition to UBI and stereotypical beliefs in Experiment 1. In Experiment 2, we assess the replicability of the effects of moral reframing, specifically the freedom-based message, on policy support among conservatives. Further, given that Experiment 1 showed that the freedom-based message reduced stereotypical policy beliefs, in Experiment 2 we further assess whether the freedom message would mitigate other prejudicial attitudes towards UBI recipients, specifically reducing welfare-related *stereotypical views* of recipients (e.g., as 'lazy' and 'irresponsible') and increasing feelings of social *affiliation* with recipients.

A literature on mental representations finds that people have stereotypic exemplars, or representations, of members of social categories in mind that may or may not be statistically

accurate, and that, in turn, influence a range of social judgments. For instance, Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2017) finds that, although the modal recipient of the main welfare program in the US (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) is statistically likely to be a White American, the typical representation people hold of a welfare recipient is of an African American. Here, although the typical recipient of a universal basic income policy would statistically be the average American in all conditions (it is “universal”), we sought to understand how narratives about the policy shape conservatives’ mental representations of the typical recipient. Specifically, we were interested to see how much the perceived characteristics of this person would reflect negative stereotypical views associated with the average welfare recipient (e.g., lazy, irresponsible) or would shift towards more positive representations (e.g., hardworking, responsible).

We also test a message that adds to the “Financial Freedom” message an additional paragraph designed to more directly counter prejudicial attitudes about recipients (e.g., stereotypes of being ‘lazy’) by referencing their ‘talent and drive’ and ability to ‘contribute’ to society. Our goal was to assess whether this “freedom plus” message would enhance the effects of the more indirect approach of moral reframing on prejudicial attitudes. However, as we will see, addressing the personal qualities of policy recipients in the message did not strengthen but, rather, weakened the effects.

### *3.1 Method*

#### *3.1.1. Participants*

To achieve 80% power (two-tailed test, alpha level of .05) to detect an effect size of  $d=0.25$  between conditions, the target sample size was 750 conservatives, or 250 per condition. We recruited participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk with the qualification of US Political

Affiliation – Conservative, excluding those who had completed our prior surveys on this topic. 889 participants completed the survey. We excluded participants who did not respond “Yes” to “In your honest opinion, should we use your data and responses?” ( $N=13$ , by condition:  $N=3$  in control,  $N=2$  in freedom,  $N=8$  in freedom plus) and who self-reported being non-conservatives (i.e., a political ideology score of 4 or less) ( $N=175$  total, by condition:  $N=50$  in control,  $N=57$  in freedom,  $N=68$  in prosperity).<sup>2</sup>

The final sample comprised 701 consenting participants ( $M_{age}=42.3$  years; 64.2% female; 87.76% White, 5.6% Black, 2.9% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian, and 1.9% Other; 53.9% Bachelor’s degree or more education, 36.9% with some college, and 9.1% with a high school degree or less; modal (27.9%) annual household income of \$25,000-\$50,000; 73.2% Republican, 19.3% Independent, 5.0% Democrat, and 2.6% Other). The sample was moderately conservative according to the same political ideology measure used in Experiment 1 ( $M=5.88$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ). Supporting the success of random assignment, we find no differences across conditions on these sociodemographic characteristics (see SM Table S2.1).

### 3.1.2. Procedure and manipulation

Similar to Experiment 1, participants were randomly assigned to read one of three policy messages: Basic Income (control), Financial Freedom, or Freedom for Prosperity (which we label here “freedom plus”).

The Financial Freedom message was identical to that in Experiment 1. The control condition was identical to that in Experiment 1, except that the policy was called the “Universal Basic Income” (UBI) policy rather than the “Basic Income” policy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These exclusion criteria reflect our pre-registered design in Experiments 2 and 3. An inferential issue that arises, however, is the possibility of differential attrition across conditions in survey completion. We address this in SM Section 2.2.

<sup>3</sup> Levels of support were similar for these two control condition messages across Studies 1-2.

A third policy message described the “Freedom for Prosperity” policy and included the same “Financial Freedom” message plus a paragraph emphasizing how “with financial freedom, individual Americans can capitalize on their own strengths and on the strength of America – the unique talents and drive of its citizens” and can have “the liberty to pursue their talents” and “the freedom to contribute to our nation’s prosperity” (see SM Section 2.1 for full text). We call this the “freedom plus” condition, adding language that more explicitly seeks to counter prejudicial, stereotypical views of recipients (i.e., as “lazy” or “dependent”).

### 3.1.3. Measures

*3.1.3.1. Manipulation check.* As in Experiment 1, after reading one of the three messages, participants were asked how the policy message related to their values, “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not.” Full details are presented in SM Section 2.3 for this exploratory measure.

*3.1.3.2. Attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy. Support for UBI and resistance to counterarguments* were measured as in Experiment 1.

*Zero-sum beliefs* was measured with 9 items, expanding upon the 3 items used in Experiment 1. This measure included items about zero-sum beliefs on policies for middle- and working-class groups in general (e.g., “Every social policy that benefits the poor inherently involves taking something away from the middle class”) and beliefs specific to UBI (e.g., “This program would create better communities for all Americans,” reverse-coded,  $1=Strongly disagree$  to  $7=Strongly agree$ ,  $\alpha=.86$ ) (some items adapted from Shnabel et al. (2016)).

*3.1.3.3. Attitudes towards recipients. Dependence beliefs* was measured as in Experiment 1.

Two measures assessed *stereotypical views of UBI recipients*. First, participants were asked to imagine and describe the “typical recipient” of the UBI policy they had read about. They were then asked to list, in an open-ended manner, 10 characteristics of that person (*stereotypical views – qualitative*; cf. Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017; Cozzarelli et al., 2001). First, as a primary, confirmatory measure of *stereotypical views*, we asked conservatives to then rate the typical recipient they imagined on three characteristics: “How [lazy/hardworking, responsible/irresponsible, competent/incompetent] is this person?” (6-point scale;  $\alpha=0.87$ ; Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017) and computed the average of their responses.

We also conducted text analysis on the 10 characteristics listed in an open-ended manner as a secondary exploratory measure. For this, we used a computational text analysis tool, from the package ‘sentimentr’ in R, that applies a dictionary-based lookup method to rate a string of words on the extent of positive to negative sentiment expressed (Rinker, 2019). This method was chosen due to its ability to capture valence shifters in the words and phrases written, particularly negators which were commonly used (e.g., “not hardworking”). For each of the 10 responses per respondent, we calculate a sentiment score, with negative values indicating negative sentiment and positive values indicating positive sentiment, and then computed the average score across all responses for each respondent. Note that respondents could have written the same word for more than one response. SM Section 2.3 also reports coding of additional open-ended questions, including on perceived physical characteristics of the recipient.

We assess social *affiliation* with, as opposed to social distance from, UBI recipients, with the average of four items: two asked “How [like me/not like me, friendly/unfriendly] is this person?” (6-point scale) and two asked how close the participant felt towards the typical

recipient and towards UBI recipients generally using the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale (scaled to 6-point;  $\alpha=0.87$ ; Aron et al., 1992).

*3.1.3.4. Process variable. Moral fit* was measured as in Experiment 1.

*3.1.3.5. Supplementary measures.* As in Study 1, we also assessed participants' *desire to receive* the policy themselves. Although our primary interest was in the effect of the policy messages on attitudes towards the new proposed policy of UBI and its recipients, we also assessed *attitudes towards people in poverty*, for whom there are entrenched societal attitudes and associations (*contribution of low-income groups to society, willingness to listen to low-income persons*) (see SM Section 2.4).

## 3.2 Results

### 3.2.1. Analytic strategy

We conducted linear regression analyses to assess condition effects. All analyses reported in Experiments 2 and 3 were pre-registered except those marked as exploratory in the text. We report multiple-hypothesis corrected p-values using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure, computed across the main effects presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Effects of UBI policy messages on conservatives' support for UBI and attitudes towards the policy and towards UBI recipients in Experiment 2

	Control	Financial Freedom	Freedom plus	Freedom vs Control		Freedom plus vs Control		Freedom vs Freedom plus	
	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	Mean (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
<b>Attitudes towards a UBI policy</b>									
Policy support	2.93 (0.14)	3.90 (0.19)	3.47 (0.20)	5.01	0.38***	2.77	0.21*	2.19	0.17*
Resistance to counter-arguments	2.81 (0.10)	3.27 (0.14)	2.85 (0.14)	3.29	0.25**	0.32	0.02	2.91	0.22**
Zero-sum beliefs	4.24 (0.09)	3.73 (0.13)	4.11 (0.13)	-4.08	-0.31***	-1.03	-0.08	-3.00	-0.23**

Attitudes towards UBI recipients									
Dependence beliefs	4.98 (0.12)	4.34 (0.17)	4.81 (0.17)	-3.83	-0.29**	-1.01	-0.08	-2.77	-0.21*
Stereotypical views	3.74 (0.10)	3.22 (0.15)	3.44 (0.15)	-3.49	-0.26**	-1.98	-0.15	-1.48	-0.11
Affiliation	2.82 (0.09)	3.39 (0.13)	3.08 (0.13)	4.48	0.34***	2.03	0.15	2.40	0.18*
<b>Process variable</b>	2.20	2.75	2.51	4.49	0.34***	2.53	0.19*	1.91	0.14
Moral fit	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.12)						

Note: All p values are corrected for multiple hypothesis testing using Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

### 3.2.2. Manipulation check

When we hand-coded the responses to the question “Does this policy reflect your values? Please describe why or why not,” we found that, while both freedom conditions increased reference to the value of ‘liberty,’ or freedom, compared to the control ( $M_{Control} = 11.9\%$ ,  $M_{Freedom} = 39.0\%$ ,  $z(698) = 6.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.49$ ;  $M_{Plus} = 30.0\%$ ,  $z(698) = 4.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.35$ ), the freedom plus condition did so to a lesser extent than the financial freedom condition ( $z(698) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .043$ ,  $d = 0.15$ ), suggesting that ‘freedom’ became less salient with the addition of the paragraph addressing the qualities of policy recipients.

### 3.2.3. Attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy

Compared to the control message ( $M = 2.93$ ), both the financial freedom message ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the freedom plus message ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $p = .011$ ) increased policy support for UBI in our conservative sample (see Table 1 for full statistical reporting). However, the freedom plus message showed significantly lower impacts compared to the simpler financial freedom message,  $p = .043$ .

Conservatives showed greater *resistance to counterarguments* in the financial freedom ( $M = 3.27$ ) compared to the control condition ( $M = 2.81$ ,  $p = .003$ ), and compared to the freedom plus condition ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $p = .009$ ). There were no differences between the latter conditions,



$p=.746$ . In this sense, the freedom plus message undermined the inoculation to common counterarguments that had been conferred in the financial freedom condition.

A similar pattern was observed for *zero-sum beliefs*. Conservatives in the financial freedom condition were less likely to endorse such beliefs about the policy ( $M=3.73$ ) compared to those in the control condition ( $M=4.24$ ),  $p<.001$ , replicating Experiment 1, and compared to those in the freedom plus condition ( $M=4.11$ ),  $p=.007$ . However, the freedom plus condition did not produce this effect,  $p=.329$ .

#### 3.2.4. Attitudes towards recipients

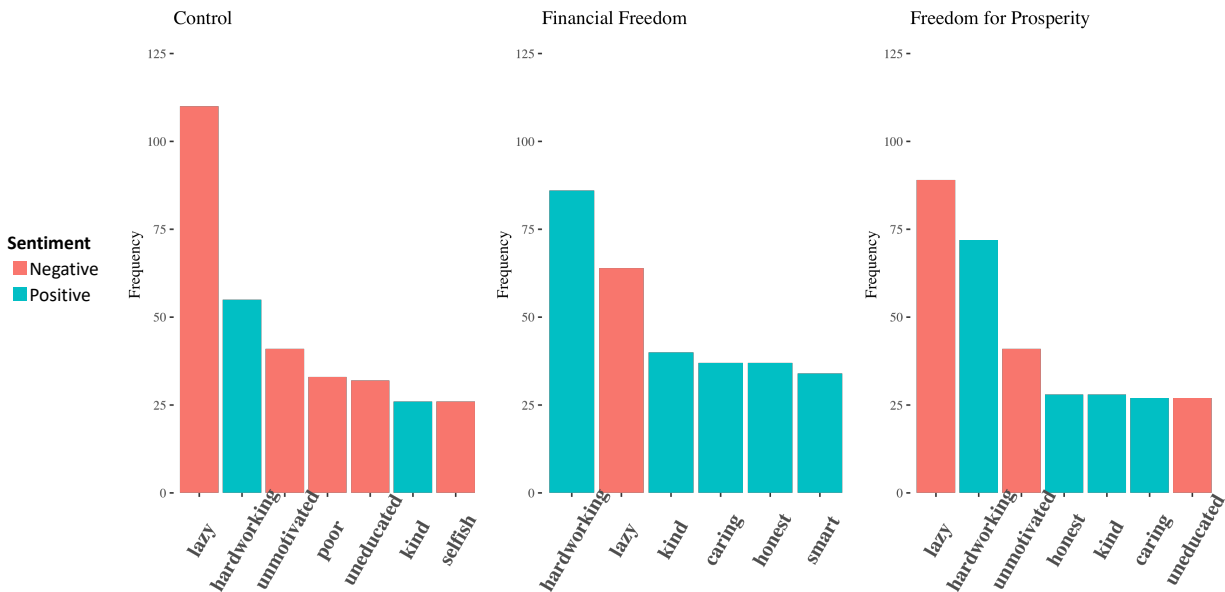
Replicating the effects observed in Experiment 1, conservatives who read the financial freedom message were less likely to view recipients as dependent, rather than empowered, by the receipt of UBI ( $M=4.34$ ) as compared to the control condition ( $M=4.98$ ),  $p=.001$ . However, these effects were, again, not observed in the freedom plus condition ( $M=4.81$ ),  $p=.329$ . Even though the additional paragraph in the freedom plus message explicitly situated recipients as empowered agents, this condition was less effective in combatting dependence beliefs than the simpler financial freedom message ( $p=0.011$ ).

When we asked conservatives to imagine and then rate the typical UBI recipient, those in the financial freedom condition showed significantly less negative stereotyping, rating the typical recipient as being less irresponsible, incompetent, and lazy ( $M=3.22$ ) compared to those in the control condition ( $M=3.74$ ),  $p=.002$ . In contrast to these significant reductions in stereotyping, the freedom plus condition produced directional but non-significant reductions ( $M=3.44$ ) relative to the control condition,  $p=.063$ .

When we asked conservatives to list up to 10 characteristics of the typical UBI recipient, we found a similar pattern of results. First, exploratory analyses found that, while in the control

condition the characteristics that conservatives wrote were negative in sentiment on average ( $M=-0.10$ ), one-sided  $t$  test from zero:  $t(242)=-4.24$ ,  $p<0.001$ , those in the financial freedom condition were positive on average ( $M=0.07$ ), one-sided  $t$  test from zero:  $t(230)=2.56$ ,  $p=0.006$ , and significantly more so than in the control condition,  $t(698)=4.65$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=0.35$ . Second, in the freedom plus condition the descriptions that conservatives wrote were neutral on average ( $M=0.00$ ), one-sided  $t$  test from zero:  $t(226)=0.09$ ,  $p=0.463$ , were significantly more positive than in the control condition,  $t(698)=2.91$ ,  $p=.005$ ,  $d=0.21$ , and were directionally, though not significantly, more negative than in the freedom condition,  $t(698)=-1.80$ ,  $p=0.072$ ,  $d=-0.14$ .

To better understand these results, we identified the six most common words used by conservatives in each condition (Fig. 4). In the control condition, five of the top six descriptors were negative in sentiment (“unmotivated,” “poor”; shown in red). In contrast, in the financial freedom condition five were positive (“kind,” “caring”; shown in teal). Focusing on “lazy,” the most commonly used single characteristic across conditions, conservatives were less likely to use “lazy” to describe UBI recipients in the financial freedom condition ( $M=28.1\%$ ) than in the control condition ( $M=45.7\%$ ),  $z(698)=-3.92$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $d=-0.30$ . However, in the freedom plus condition, “lazy” was restored to the top of the list of characteristics ( $M=41.0\%$ ), used more frequently than in the financial freedom condition,  $z(698)=2.88$ ,  $p=0.004$ ,  $d=0.22$ , and no less than in the control condition,  $z(698)=-1.03$ ,  $p=.303$ ,  $d=-0.08$ .



**Fig. 4.** The most common words used by conservatives to describe the typical UBI recipient within each policy message condition in Experiment 2

Note. Respondents were asked to list 10 possible characteristics to describe the typical recipient of UBI. Frequency on the y-axis is the number of times within each condition that respondents wrote the descriptor listed on the x axis. Top terms were cleaned (e.g., ‘hard worker’ to ‘hardworking’) for the purpose of this analysis.

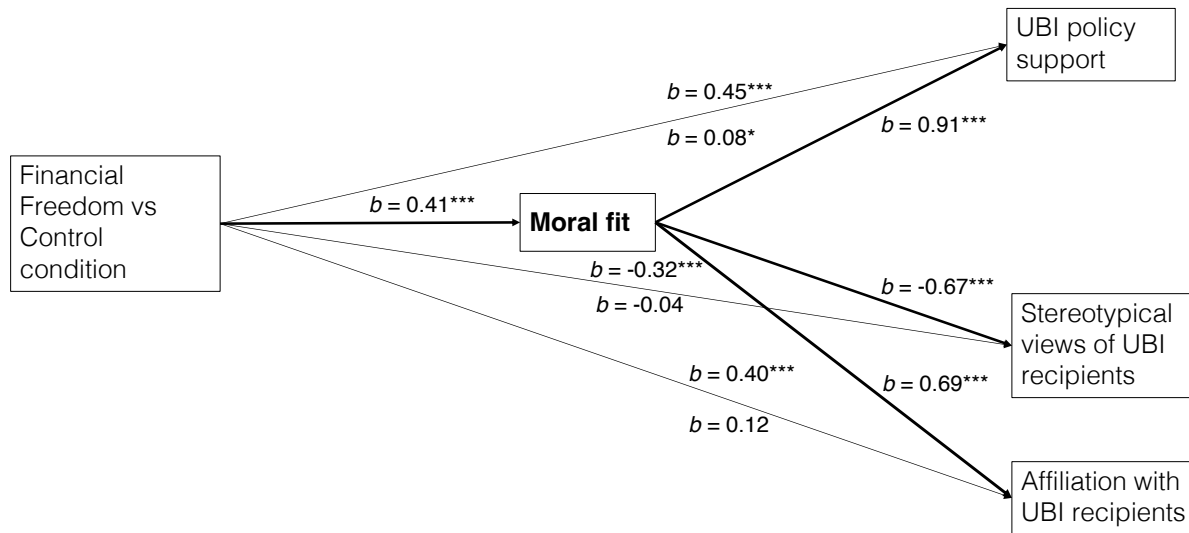
In addition to mitigating stereotypical representations of UBI recipients, the financial freedom message significantly increased conservatives’ *affiliation* with recipients ( $M=3.39$ ) compared to the control ( $M=2.82$ ),  $p<.001$ . In many open-ended responses, participants in the financial freedom condition described the recipient as being similar to themselves (e.g., “The typical person probably looks like me. He/she is hard working, yet makes little money for what they do.”). By contrast, as seen in the patterns above, the freedom plus message led to less *affiliation* with recipients compared to the financial freedom message ( $M=3.08$ ),  $p=.027$ , and these effects were directionally but not significantly above control,  $p=.060$ .

### 3.2.5. Process variable

Both freedom messages increased perceived *moral fit* with the policy compared to the control ( $M_{Control}=2.20$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=2.75$ ),  $p<0.001$ , ( $M_{Plus}=2.51$ ),  $p=.020$ . However, the freedom plus message showed directionally, though not significantly, lower moral fit than in the financial freedom condition,  $p=.070$ .

Pre-registered analyses replicated the mediation of the effects on policy support through moral fit, replicating Experiment 1 among conservatives. There were significant indirect effects of moral fit on the relationship between financial freedom condition (0=control message, 1=financial freedom condition) and increased policy support (*Indirect effect*=0.36, 95% CI=[0.21, 0.53],  $p<0.001$ ) (see Fig. 5).

For our measures of prejudicial attitudes towards recipients, we focus on stereotypical views of recipients and affiliation given that these relate most directly to the marginalization of recipients as a social group. A post-hoc analysis explored whether moral fit could also account for the observed reductions in stereotypical views and increases in affiliation in the financial freedom condition and found support for this hypothesis (respectively: *Indirect effect*=-0.27, 95% CI=[-0.40, -0.16],  $p<0.001$ ; *Indirect effect*=0.28, 95% CI=0.17, 0.42],  $p<0.001$ ). Figure 5 presents mediation analyses for the financial freedom condition compared to the control condition on these outcomes.



**Fig. 5.** Statistical mediation of the effect of the financial freedom condition on support for UBI, stereotypical views of UBI recipients, and affiliation with UBI recipients through increased perceived moral fit among conservatives in Experiment 2

Outcome variables are standardized. Paths stemming from the experimental condition box on the topmost line are interpreted as causal and all others as correlational. Asterisks indicate statistical significance (\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ).

For the freedom plus versus control condition, we also find a significant indirect effect of moral fit on the outcome of policy support (*Indirect effect*=0.21, 95% CI=[0.05, 0.38],  $p=0.006$ ).

While the freedom plus condition did not significantly reduce *stereotypical views* or increase *affiliation*, we also see significant indirect effects of moral fit on these outcomes (respectively, *Indirect effect*=-0.16, 95% CI=[-0.28, -0.03],  $p=0.024$  and *Indirect effect*=0.16, 95% CI=[0.03, 0.29],  $p=0.010$ ). This result is consistent with the possibility that an unassessed third variable suppressed improvement in views of policy recipients in the freedom plus condition, counteracting the positive effect of greater moral fit.

### 3.2.6. Supplementary measures

Both freedom conditions increase conservatives' *desire to receive* the UBI policy themselves. Although we had initially been interested in the possibility of positive spillover

effects on *attitudes towards people in poverty* in the freedom conditions, there were no condition effects on these measures. See SM Section 2.4 for full details.

### 3.3 Discussion

Replicating Experiment 1, Experiment 2 again found that the financial freedom message increased support for UBI among conservatives. Moreover, Experiment 2 extends the literature on moral reframing (Feinberg & Willer, 2019) by demonstrating improvement on another dimension—prejudice reduction. Here, the financial freedom message mitigated stereotypical views of UBI recipients and increased feelings of affiliation with UBI recipients.

A striking finding in Experiment 2 was that the freedom plus condition, although it also increased moral fit and policy support, it did so in general to a lesser extent and, moreover, did not improve attitudes toward policy recipients. This condition was identical to the financial freedom condition but added content that explicitly countered negative stereotypes of policy recipients. We believe that two processes may account for these results. First, the additional content may have distracted from the focus on values in the financial freedom message. Second, by raising qualities of policy recipients, the freedom plus message may have led conservatives to consider the personal qualities of UBI recipients and, having done so, led them to default back to pejorative views. Consistent with this interpretation, the freedom plus condition restored “lazy” to the top of the list of characteristics that participants used to describe UBI recipients, as in the control condition. Moreover, mediation analyses in Experiment 2 showed that, even as there were no direct effects of the freedom plus condition on prejudice against UBI recipients, the greater moral fit that was achieved in this condition had a positive indirect effect on these outcomes, as in the financial freedom condition.

Together, these findings imply that moral reframing may be effective due to its focus on positive, aspirational values and, thus, its indirect approach to prejudice reduction.

#### **4. Experiment 3**

Experiments 1-2 showed that the narrative communicating UBI matters above and beyond its objective policy details in increasing support for UBI and in mitigating prejudicial attitudes toward its recipients among conservatives. Experiment 3, which was pre-registered, again compares the “Financial Freedom” UBI message to the policy details alone. Here, we benchmark views of UBI recipients to views of current welfare recipients, using a 2 (financial freedom vs. policy details message, between-subjects)  $\times$  2 (views of UBI vs. welfare recipients, within-subjects) mixed-model design. The aim was to determine how much more positively conservatives would view recipients of the novel policy of UBI relative to welfare, and how much more the freedom-based framing of UBI would achieve beyond that baseline improvement.

We also sought to better understand how moral reframing reduced prejudicial attitudes towards UBI recipients. In Experiment 2, we found that moral fit mediated the effect of the freedom message on reducing prejudicial attitudes and that adding more explicit, prejudice-targeted language (“freedom plus”) was less effective than the simpler freedom-focused message. Based on these findings, we hypothesized that moral reframing may reduce prejudicial attitudes by a more indirect approach—one that elevates to top of mind the desired moral benefits of the policy, specifically its expansion of freedoms—more so than a direct approach of combatting latent, welfare-related concerns.

Finally, we assess two additional measures of support for UBI. First is a behavioral measure of support, choice to voice one’s opposition to ongoing pilots of UBI. Second is

commitment to the unconditionality of UBI, which reflects a test of the robustness of conservatives' support for the policy and potentially also their attitudes towards recipients. Unconditionality is a core feature of a UBI policy distinguishing it from other welfare policies that are conditional, for instance, on the recipient actively seeking work or taking mandatory drug tests. Such conditionalities have been shown to reflect negative stereotypes of welfare recipients and a distrust in their capabilities (Cooley et al., 2019; Schroeder et al., 2017; Soss et al., 2011). Given that the freedom message reduced negative stereotyping in Experiment 2, we assessed whether this message would also increase conservatives' commitment to implementing UBI without such conditionalities. However, as we will see, conservatives' commitment to the unconditionality of UBI was exceptionally low and neither it nor the behavioral measure of support were increased by the freedom message.

#### *4.1 Method*

##### *4.1.1 Participants*

To achieve 80% power (two-tailed test, alpha level of .05) to detect an effect size of  $d=0.25$  between conditions, the target sample size was 500 conservatives, or 250 conservatives per condition. We recruited US adults from Cloud Research (formerly Turk Prime) (Litman et al., 2017) with the qualification of political views being "Conservative" or "Very Conservative," predicting that approximately 15-20% of these participants would not self-report as conservative or pass the exclusion criteria, based on the previous studies. 648 participants completed the survey. We used the same exclusion criteria from Experiment 2 and as pre-registered. We excluded those who did not respond "Yes" to whether we should use their data at the end of the



survey ( $N=16$ , by condition:  $N=5$  in control,  $N=11$  in freedom) and self-reported non-conservatives ( $N=73$ , by condition:  $N=35$  in control,  $N=38$  in freedom).<sup>4</sup>

The final sample was 559 consenting conservatives ( $M_{age}=41.9$  years; 49.4% female; 85.5% White, 3.6% Black, 4.7% Hispanic, 4.1% Asian, and 2.1% Other; 39.0% Bachelor's degree or more education, 28.6% with some college, and 32.2% with a high school degree or less; modal (25.0%) annual household income of \$50,000-\$75,000; 77.3% Republican, 16.5% Independent, 3.6% Democrat, and 2.7% Other). As in Experiment 2, the sample was moderately conservative in political ideology ( $M=5.94$ ,  $SD=0.76$ ) (See SM Table S3.1).

#### 4.1.2. Procedure and Manipulation

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two policy messages: policy details (control) or these details with the Financial Freedom message, matching these conditions in Experiments 1-2.

#### 4.1.3. Measures

*4.1.3.1. Attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy.* Policy support was measured with the *single-item support* measure from Experiments 1 and 2.

As a behavioral measure of support, after participants completed the survey, on the final page we described ongoing pilot tests being conducted or planned in many states and asked participants if they wanted to “voice your support for or opposition to current basic income policy initiatives across the country.” Given that our previous experiments found that the freedom message lessened opposition (as opposed to boosting support), we coded this as *voiced opposition* (1=oppose, 0=oppose or no response). We also examined effects on taking any type of action (1=support, 2=neither, 3=oppose).

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<sup>4</sup>As in Experiment 2, these exclusion criteria were pre-registered, and we address the issue of attrition in SM Section 3.1.

We assessed participants' *commitment to the unconditionality of UBI*, i.e., to the features that distinguish UBI from current welfare policies. We asked participants how much they would want to amend the policy to make it more conditional and restrictive (5 items, e.g., "This assistance should be monitored so it is revoked from anyone who uses it on alcohol, tobacco, or drugs"; 7-point Likert scale from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .87$ ).

*4.1.3.2. Attitudes towards recipients.* Here, we assess attitudes both towards UBI recipients and towards current welfare recipients. After being asked to describe the typical person receiving basic income, participants rated this person on the three items of *stereotypical views* from Experiment 2 with the addition of an item measuring their perceived morality ("How [lazy/hardworking, responsible/irresponsible, competent/incompetent, immoral/moral] is this person?", 6-point scale,  $\alpha = .96$ ). Participants also rated the typical recipient on a 3-item *affiliation* measure ( $\alpha = .79$ ), which matched the measure from Experiment 2 but removing one redundant IOS item.

As a basis of comparison, we assessed the same measures for current welfare recipients. After being asked to describe the typical person receiving welfare today, participants were asked to rate the typical welfare recipient on the same four items measuring *stereotypical views* and the same three items measuring *affiliation*.

*4.1.3.3. Process variable. Moral fit* was measured with the 3-item scale used in Experiments 1 and 2.

We wanted to better understand the specific nature and mechanisms of moral reframing, particularly given that our measure of moral fit captures a high-level evaluation of the policy. We were specifically interested to understand how moral reframing may be influencing prejudicial attitudes—whether by highlighting positive moral features of the policy, reducing the activation

of latent welfare-related concerns, or both. We assessed how much the message elevates to top of mind the positive *moral benefits* of the policy, which in this case relates to the expansion of individual freedoms (3 items, e.g., “I feel that this policy would give people more freedom to choose how they want to live”,  $\alpha = .91$ ). While moral fit assesses whether the message broadly matches the values of the intended audience, this measure specifically assesses how the message ties the policy to the targeted value of freedom. We also assessed the activation of negative *latent welfare-related concerns* (Schroeder et al., 2017; Soss et al., 2011), specifically feelings that recipients would misuse the policy (3 items, e.g., “I worry that people would waste the money they receive through this policy”,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Items were measured on 7-point Likert scales from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*.

## 4.2. Results

### 4.2.1 Analytic strategy

We ran linear regression for continuous outcomes and logistic regression for binary outcomes to assess condition effects. As in Experiment 2, all analyses were pre-registered unless otherwise marked as exploratory, and we compute multiple-hypothesis corrected p-values across the pre-registered outcomes presented in the main text that are not marked as supplementary or exploratory. To compare condition effects on attitudes towards UBI recipients versus a baseline of attitudes towards existing welfare recipients, we employ a mixed 2 (between-subjects: freedom message, control) x 2 (within-subjects: UBI recipients, welfare recipients) design.

### 4.2.2. Attitudes towards and beliefs about the policy.

Replicating Experiments 1 and 2, the freedom condition increased support for UBI among conservatives ( $M_{\text{Control}} = 3.05$ ,  $M_{\text{Freedom}} = 3.90$ ),  $t(557) = 4.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.42$ .

Although we hypothesized that the freedom message would strengthen conservatives' *commitment to the unconditionality* of UBI, we found low levels of such commitment across conditions ( $M_{Control}=2.43$   $M_{Freedom}=2.45$ ),  $t(557)=0.19$ ,  $p=.853$ ,  $d=0.02$ . In other words, conservatives showed relatively strong preferences to add conditions to the UBI policy across all conditions. In an exploratory analysis, we created a correlation matrix among all outcome variables and found that the strongest predictor of greater *commitment* was reduced *latent welfare-related concerns* ( $r=-0.52$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), a measure which was directionally but not significantly affected by the manipulation (see section 4.2.4 below).

A logistic regression revealed no difference across conditions in *voiced opposition* to current “pilot tests of a basic income policy” across the US ( $M_{Control}=33.9\%$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=30.7\%$ ),  $z(557)=-0.81$ ,  $p=.514$ ,  $d=-0.07$ . Further, an exploratory test found no differences across conditions on whether participants selected to voice opposition, voice support, or neither ( $\chi^2(2, N=559)=0.84$ ,  $p=.656$ ).

#### 4.2.3. Attitudes towards UBI recipients and towards welfare recipients.

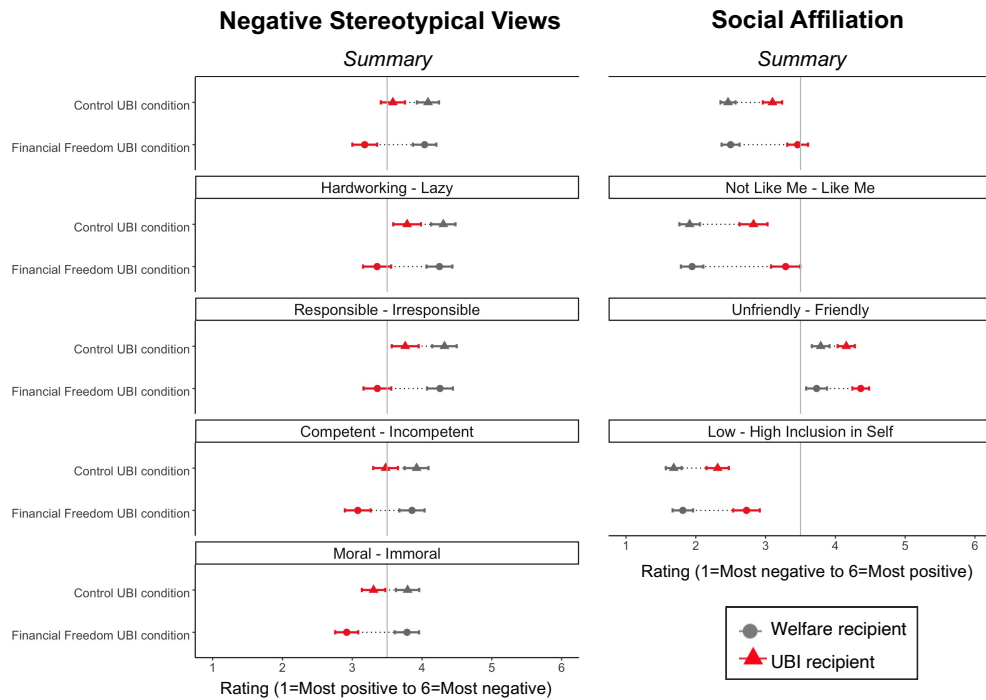
Fig. 6 illustrates three findings. First, in focusing on the red icons in the figure, we replicated the finding from Experiment 2 that, compared to the control UBI message ( $M=3.58$ ), the freedom condition reduced negative stereotypical views of the typical UBI recipient, with participants rating them as less lazy, irresponsible, incompetent, and immoral in the freedom condition ( $M=3.18$ ),  $t(557)=-3.19$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $d=-0.27$ . Second, in focusing on the grey icons in the figure, stereotypical views of the typical welfare recipient, which were our benchmark for welfare-related stereotypes, did not differ across the freedom and control conditions ( $M_{Control}=4.09$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=4.04$ ),  $t(557)=-0.41$ ,  $p=.725$ ,  $d=-0.03$ , as well as for affiliation toward the typical welfare recipient ( $M_{Control}=2.46$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=2.50$ ),  $t(557)=0.43$ ,  $p=.725$ ,  $d=0.04$ .

Third, in focusing on the dashed lines between the grey and red icons which illustrate within-participant difference scores, across both message conditions conservatives rated the typical UBI recipient less negatively than they rated the typical welfare recipient. Notably, according to this mixed between- and within-subjects comparison, while the average difference score between ratings of the typical welfare recipient and typical UBI recipient was significant in the control UBI condition ( $M_{DiffScore\_Control} = -0.50$ ),  $t(557) = -5.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -0.49$ , it was significant and larger yet with the freedom message ( $M_{DiffScore\_Freedom} = -0.86$ ),  $t(557) = -9.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -.79$ . This difference-in-difference score, of within-person differences between welfare and UBI recipients and between-person differences between the control and freedom UBI messages, was significant,  $t(557) = -2.79$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $d = -0.24$ , driven by greater gains in positive views of UBI recipients in the freedom condition compared to the control condition. As a robustness check, an exploratory mixed linear model with a random intercept for participant found a significant interaction between message condition and recipient type (interaction  $\beta = -0.35$ , 95% CI = [-0.60, -0.11],  $t(557) = -2.79$ ,  $p = .005$ ). In other words, participants showed reduced negative stereotyping of UBI recipients compared to welfare recipients but these reductions were multiplied by a factor of 1.75 with the values-aligned freedom message.

Notably, in terms of absolute levels, while the rating of stereotypical characteristics of the welfare recipient was negative on average across conditions ( $M = 4.06$ , one-sided  $t$  test from the midpoint of 3.5:  $t(558) = 9.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the rating of the UBI recipient in the control condition was neutral on average ( $M = 3.58$ , one-sided  $t$  test from the midpoint of 3.5:  $t(294) = 0.93$ ,  $p = .176$ ), only for the UBI recipient in the freedom condition was the rating positive on average ( $M = 3.18$ , one-sided  $t$  test from the midpoint of 3.5:  $t(263) = -3.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In other

words, negative stereotyping was reversed only for views of the typical UBI recipient in the freedom condition.

As in Experiment 2, in the between-subjects comparison, the freedom message increased affiliation with UBI recipients relative to the control UBI message ( $M_{Control}=3.10$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=3.46$ ),  $t(557)=3.48$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $d=0.30$ . In the mixed between- and within-subjects comparison, the average difference score between affiliation with the typical welfare recipient and UBI recipient was significant in the control UBI condition ( $M_{DiffScore\_Control}=0.64$ ),  $t(557)=9.01$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=0.76$ , and significant and larger yet with the freedom message ( $M_{DiffScore\_Freedom}=0.96$ ),  $t(557)=12.85$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=1.09$ ; difference-in-difference:  $t(557)=3.15$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $d=0.27$ .



**Fig. 6.** Conservatives' attitudes towards the typical UBI policy recipient in comparison to the typical welfare recipient, by UBI policy message in Experiment 3

The 'Summary' variables are the averages across the items. Between-participant differences, that is, the effect of UBI message condition on attitudes towards welfare recipients and towards UBI recipients can be read vertically,

within facet. Within-participant differences between attitudes towards welfare and UBI recipients can be read horizontally, as indicated by the dotted lines. Error bars are 95% CI for the between-participant comparisons.

#### 4.2.4. *Process variables*

Experiment 3 replicated the effects from Experiments 1 and 2 showing that the freedom message increased perceived *moral fit* with the policy ( $M_{Control}=2.25$ ,  $M_{Freedom}=2.78$ ),  $t(557)=5.25$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $d=0.44$ . The patterns of mediation found in Experiments 1 and 2 also replicated (see SM Section 3.2).

We found that the freedom message elevated the perceived *moral benefits* of a UBI policy, more so than it reduced the activation of *latent welfare-related concerns*. Conservatives in the freedom condition reporting feeling that the UBI policy would expand freedoms, ( $M=4.24$ ) more than those in the control ( $M=3.47$ ),  $t(557)=4.71$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $d=0.40$ . In contrast, the freedom condition directionally but not significantly mitigated *latent welfare-related concerns* about recipient misuse ( $M=5.52$ ) compared to the control ( $M=5.77$ ),  $t(557)=-1.93$ ,  $p=.073$ ,  $d=-0.16$ . In other words, it did not activate such pre-existing negative concerns and, if anything, allayed them. Moreover, the gain in moral benefits was significantly greater than the mitigation of latent welfare-related concerns, according to an exploratory analysis of a mixed linear model with random intercept for participant and an interaction term between condition and question type (1=latent concerns, 2=moral benefits), interaction term:  $\beta=1.03$ , 95% CI=[0.62, 1.44],  $t(1114)=4.90$ ,  $p<.001$ .

#### 4.3. *Discussion*

Experiment 3 replicated the findings of Experiments 1 and 2 on both increased support for UBI and reduced prejudice against UBI recipients with the freedom framing and extended those findings in two important ways. In addition to meeting the values of conservatives (as reflected in higher moral fit), the freedom message led conservatives to see the policy in terms of

its moral benefits, specifically around expansions of freedom, more so than it directly combatted latent welfare-related concerns, specifically about recipients' misuse. This pattern suggests that one way that the freedom framing may have reduced prejudice was by supporting the formation of new and more positive attitudes about the policy and its recipients, more so than directly combatting pre-existing negative ones. Another implication of these findings is that, even as participants held more positive views of recipients, they still worried about misuse of benefits, and this finding is consistent with conservatives' desire to add conditionalities to UBI regardless of policy message.

Second, directly comparing views of UBI and welfare recipients, we found that even as UBI recipients were viewed more positively than welfare recipients, this improvement nearly doubled with the freedom message. These results, first, support the beliefs of advocates and policymakers who maintain that UBI will be less vulnerable than welfare to prejudicial views of recipients. However, communicating UBI in terms of the value of freedom led to further improvements in views of recipients, by almost as much as the change in the content of the policy features (i.e., between welfare and UBI).

## **5. Meta-Analysis**

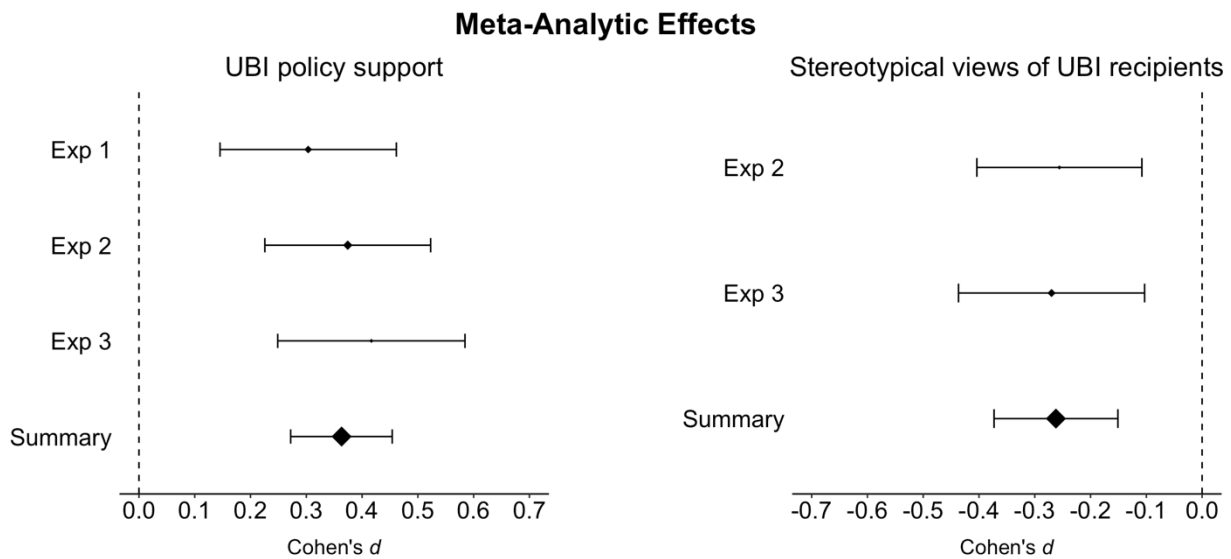
### *5.1. Methods and analytic strategy*

We conducted a meta-analysis to quantify the effects of the freedom message among conservatives across Experiments 1-3 on policy support and moral fit and from Experiments 2-3 on stereotypical views of UBI recipients. We use the Cohen's  $d$  values as reported herein and compute the meta-analytic effect with the package 'rmeta' in R (Lumley, 2018).



## 5.2. Results

Among conservatives, the freedom message of UBI achieved a meta-analytic effect of increased policy support for UBI of  $d=0.36$  [95% CI: 0.27 to 0.46] over the control message. The meta-analytic effect on perceived moral fit was similar in size ( $d=0.35$  [95% CI: 0.26 to 0.44]), and that on negative stereotypical views of UBI recipients was slightly smaller ( $d=-0.27$  [95% CI: -0.38 to -0.16]). See Fig. 7.



**Fig. 7.** Meta-analytic effects of the Financial Freedom message on conservatives' support of a UBI policy and stereotypical views of UBI recipients

The diamond size is proportional to the sample size. Error bars are 95% CI. For Experiment 1, the effect size is the simple slopes effect at the value of 'moderately conservative' on political ideology.

## 6. General Discussion

Universal Basic Income aims to reverse rising deep poverty and inequality and combat welfare-related prejudice. Yet can this policy create new attitudes? Three experiments suggest that when UBI was communicated in terms of a conservative value of economic freedom conservatives saw a high level of moral fit with the policy. Only then were their negative attitudes towards the policy and prejudicial attitudes towards its recipients mitigated.

### *6.1. Theoretical contributions*

These findings point to a new direction in prejudice reduction research—that of leveraging moral reframing in institutional communications. Prejudice operates at the level of individual beliefs and behaviors, yet it can be reinforced by institutions and, specifically, by the narratives attached to them. Narratives about the institution of welfare have been historically created and cultivated in ways that produce stigma and prejudice toward its recipients (e.g., “the welfare queen”). Fittingly, we find that a solution to combatting welfare-related prejudice may lie at the same level—of the narratives attached to welfare policies and, here, communicated via policy messages. Crucially, we demonstrate that moral reframing of institutional communications may be particularly effective because it focuses readers on the aspirational values advanced the policy and, in so doing, appears to facilitate the formation of new and more positive attitudes.

By what mechanisms might such values-aligned communications mitigate prejudice? At a higher-order level, these findings suggest that inclusion begets inclusion: when conservatives felt the policy recognized and reflected their own values, they were more likely to display supportive attitudes towards the policy and inclusive attitudes toward its recipients. Multiple processes may drive this higher-order effect of the freedom-based message. First, based on mediation analyses, we find support for moral fit fostering affiliation with and positive views of policy recipients. One possibility is that moral fit fostered a shared identity, as reflected in respondents seeing recipients as being more “like me,” which may have arisen, for instance, from an implication of both parties sharing the value of freedom; as a consequence, respondents may have extended self-serving biases to recipients, including seeing them as more competent and responsible (Schroeder et al., 2017). Second, we find that these more positive attitudes

towards recipients may have been facilitated by a narrow focus on the positive, valued-based features of the policy, and an avoidance of activating latent welfare-related concerns. Lastly, and possibly relatedly, while our data cannot speak to this mechanism, moral fit may have reduced an identity threat associated with partisan divides and increased openness to new perspectives on the policy and its recipients. Future research may use manipulate-the-mediator designs (Spencer et al., 2005) to causally identify such identity-related and cognitive processes of moral fit that may drive reductions in prejudicial attitudes.

## *6.2. Future directions*

The present experiments demonstrated robust impacts of the freedom message on immediate outcomes of gains in support for UBI and reductions in prejudice, replicated across multiple studies and measures. This suggests that freedom-based messages may be a promising narrative foundation for UBI policies.

However, would these effects survive in the present highly partisan and racially divided US political environment? On the one hand, Experiments 1 and 2 found that the freedom message not only increased conservatives' support but moreover led them to resist common counterarguments that would likely arise in the real world. Yet on the other hand, Experiment 2 found that negative welfare-related stereotypes may be easy to re-activate, even unintentionally, with language that raises the personal qualities of policy recipients. Experiment 3 moreover found that the freedom message did not affect two outcomes which were strongly related: conservatives' preferences for adding conditionalities to the policy and latent concerns about recipients' misuse of the policy. In the real world and outside of the experimental context, those opposed to UBI might conjure up stereotypes related to recipients' laziness and irresponsibility, including explicitly anti-Black stereotypes, to advocate against UBI or otherwise advocate for

policy conditionalities (e.g., work requirements, drug use monitoring) (Cooley et al., 2019; Wetts & Willer, 2019). If the latter were to occur, would this effectively render UBI as being designed like the welfare programs that conservatives oppose and undermine the potential of UBI for shifting the current welfare paradigm? An open question is thus how vulnerable conservatives' support for UBI is to these processes and what might be done to mitigate them. Can variations on freedom-based messages allay concerns about recipients' misuse of the policy, concerns which are largely unfounded (Evans & Popova, 2017)? For instance, might tying the narrative of freedom explicitly to freedom from conditionalities resonate with conservatives and mitigate this preference for them?

Although we focused here on perceptions of moral fit, we also found that the perceived effectiveness of UBI was a particularly strong predictor of support for it. Cooley et al. (2019) find that providing information on how welfare recipients are able to achieve financial independence also increases support for welfare policies and reduces negative stereotyping. Building on this, might a narrative that integrates the ideas of freedom as exerting autonomy and freedom as achieving financial independence build the public's trust in recipients' capacities and agency (Schroeder et al., 2017)?

Finally, intersectional analyses across race/ethnicity, social class, and political ideology will be particularly informative in understanding the effects of freedom-based narratives in the US. Here, we found that narratives of freedom highlighting individual autonomy and freedom from others' influence was most effective for predominantly White conservatives from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. However, results may differ among subgroups of conservatives from working-class contexts and minoritized groups. For instance, given that working class Americans and some minoritized groups tend to value interdependence to a greater degree, in

addition to independence (Markus, 2017), future research with these groups may examine the effectiveness of the individual freedom narrative and compare it to one grounded in group self-determination or collective freedom.

### *6.3. Conclusion*

Welfare reform attempts of the recent past have aspired but largely failed to establish evidence-based and bipartisan solutions to mitigating poverty and inequality. Perhaps crucially, they have been unable to bridge the moral divides across political groups or change the prejudicial beliefs often associated with welfare. Here we demonstrate how reframing of a policy in terms of core moral values can simultaneously mitigate entrenched prejudice against recipients of welfare in America and build support for a policy with the potential to reduce inequality.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

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**Data Accessibility**

All de-identified data and materials, as well as the time-stamped pre-registrations for Experiments 2-3 and any deviations, are made publicly available via the Open Science Framework at [https://osf.io/kn6s4/?view\\_only=7a0681d05f6746d89c490b36fbb490a8](https://osf.io/kn6s4/?view_only=7a0681d05f6746d89c490b36fbb490a8).

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