Framing issues and identities: Aligning the content of group identity with the meaning of issues to produce normative influence.

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Declaration of authorship

I, Kerry James O’Brien,

Declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at the Australian National University;

Where I have consulted with the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work, written in collaboration with my supervisory panel members and paper co-author as stated per chapter;

I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

Where this thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

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Abstract

This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the social influence processes commonly at play in public debate; to understand how rhetoric about issues and about social groups can influence public opinion. This research draws upon the social identity tradition (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) which suggests that people’s attitudes and behaviour are influenced by the norms of groups they identify with, and that this influence depends on the extent to which the issue at hand is perceived as relevant to the group (e.g., Smith, Terry, Crosier & Duck, 2005; Mackie, Worth & Asuncion, 1990; Wyer, 2010). The question of which group is relevant to a particular issue, however, is not always self-evident and those who seek to shape public attitudes will offer interpretations of the nature of groups or issues in order to establish the relevance of a group whose norms are in line with their own agenda.

In Chapter 3, we detail work by Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues on the strategic construction of identity, and their notion that those who seek to shape public opinion need to become entrepreneurs of identity. In Chapter 4, we review the literature on issue framing which shows how different rhetorical constructions of an issue can influence attitudes (e.g. Chong & Druckman, 2007). We outline findings from the field of political science demonstrating the extent to which people are guided by party cues, particularly in contexts which suggest that the issue is relevant to the party (Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013). We also outline research by Cohen (2003) suggesting that people draw upon their understanding of groups and group norms to make sense of issues.
Chapter 5 reports on two studies investigating the connection between religion and political attitudes. The results indicate that highlighting the relevance of either cultural issues (i.e. abortion, euthanasia and gay rights) or civic issues (i.e. welfare, climate change, asylum seekers) to participants’ Christian identity can influence the extent to which group norms influence attitudes towards different types of issues. Chapter 6 reports on two further studies that examine the effect that framing climate change as a moral, economic or political issue has on the extent to which religious/spiritual group, class group or partisan group norms predict attitudes. The results indicate that different framings of climate change can influence the extent to which different group norms predict attitudes, with contrasting effects depending on the level of identification with the group.

In the final chapter we draw out the implications of these findings with regard to the theoretical background outlined. We identify a number of implications relating to the practice of research in the field of social identity as well as the practice of mass persuasion. We also identify some avenues for future research to add to the wealth of knowledge in this area.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“The aide said that ‘guys like me were in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality - judiciously, as you will - we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'" (US political correspondent, Ron Suskind, describing an encounter with a senior aide to then US President George W. Bush), (Suskind, 2004).

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to our understanding of the social influence processes that are commonly at play in public debate; to understand how rhetoric about issues and about social groups influences public opinion. This research draws upon the social identity tradition (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), which suggests that people’s attitudes and behaviour are systematically influenced by the norms of groups to which they belong, and particularly so for those who are highly identified with the group (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 1996; Terry, Hogg & White, 1999). However, even those who strongly identify with a group will not be guided by group norms on every conceivable issue. Evidence from both the social influence (e.g., Smith, Terry, Crosier & Duck, 2005) and persuasion literature (e.g., Mackie,
Worth & Asuncion, 1990; Wyer, 2010) shows that influence depends on the extent to which the issue in question is perceived as relevant to the group.

The question of which group or social identity is relevant to a particular issue is not always self-evident. There may be a range of groups that could be perceived as relevant, depending on how the issue and the various groups are construed. Indeed, there is often a degree of ambiguity in people’s understanding of the nature of issues (what they are about, what interests or values they implicate) and the nature of groups (what defines them, what interests and values they represent). This can be of some consequence given that the norms of various groups may differ on a given issue, and one’s attitude could vary significantly depending on which group is deemed to be relevant (Reicher, 2004). As such, those who seek to shape public attitudes may attempt to influence which group is perceived as relevant to a particular issue, offering interpretations of the nature of groups or issues to establish the relevance of a group whose norms are in line with their own agenda. It is this process that I seek to explore in this thesis.

In Chapter 2, I trace the theoretical roots of the contemporary understanding of social influence, exploring the differences between the individualist and the interactionist view of the relationship between the individual and the group. I outline the evolution of these ideas with reference to some of the seminal studies in social psychology. I outline the social identity perspective on social influence and review evidence that group-based influence can be the product of a deliberative, rational process. I then explore the crucial role that perceived relevance plays in group-based influence, citing research demonstrating that people are guided by group norms and are persuaded by ingroup members to the extent that the issue is perceived to be relevant to the group.
In Chapter 3, I explore the implications of these ideas both for the practice of social psychological research, and for the practice of social influence. I detail work by Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues on the strategic construction of identity, and their notion that those who seek to shape public opinion need to become *entrepreneurs of identity*. I then outline Reicher and Hopkins’ analyses of the social categorical underpinnings of the rhetoric of public figures who seek to persuade and mobilise constituencies to a common cause (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b, Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997, Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, Reicher and Hopkins, 2001b; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010).

In Chapter 4, I review the literature on issue framing that explores how different constructions of an issue can influence attitudes (e.g. Chong & Druckman, 2007). While much of this research is based on an individualist view of attitudes and attitude change, there are notable exceptions that incorporate an understanding of the role of groups and social context. I then outline findings from political science research demonstrating the extent to which people are guided by party cues in their attitudes towards issues. Here, too, I cite evidence that this is more than simply mindless conformity; that people are only guided by party cues in contexts which suggest that the issue is relevant to the group (Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010; Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013). I also outline research by Cohen (2003) that offers valuable insights into the process by which people are guided by group norms. Cohen’s findings suggest that people draw upon their understanding of groups and group norms to make sense of issues. It also suggests that this process depends in part on a degree of ambiguity in people’s understanding of the group, or the issue, or both. This work represents a launching point for the empirical studies presented in this thesis.
Chapter 5 reports on two studies designed to investigate the connection between religion and political attitudes, and whether the way religious identity is framed can influence the connection between religious identification, religious norms and attitudes towards various political issues. More specifically, the studies examine whether highlighting the relevance of either cultural issues (i.e. abortion, euthanasia and gay rights) or civic issues (i.e. welfare, climate change, asylum seekers) to religious identity increases the extent to which religious group norms influence attitudes towards those types of issues, particularly among those who are highly identified with the religious group.

Chapter 6 reports on two further studies that aim to investigate whether the way an issue is framed can affect the perceived relevance of various groups and the extent to which the norms associated with those groups predict attitudes. The studies explore these ideas in the context of attitudes towards climate change, employing the type of frames that are commonly found in the public debate about the issue. Specifically, I examine the effect that framing climate change as a moral, economic or political issue has on the extent to which religious/spiritual group, class group or partisan group norms predict attitudes, particularly for those who are highly identified with those groups. I also investigate whether the effect of these frames is more pronounced among those with high levels of political knowledge, and whether perceived relevance mediates the effect of framing.

In Chapter 7, I summarise the findings of the four studies reported. I draw out the implications of these findings in terms of the theoretical background outlined and identify a number of implications in terms of the practice of research and the practice of mass persuasion on important issues. Finally, I identify some avenues for future research to add to the wealth of knowledge in this area.
Chapter 2 – Social influence as a single, rational process

From the birth of modern social psychology there has been a tension between two perspectives on group-based phenomena: an individualist perspective and an interactionist perspective. The individualist view, represented by Floyd Allport (1924), Festinger (1950) and others, sees the individual as the sole psychological reality, with all social and group-based phenomena as merely an extension and elaboration of individual psychological processes. The interactionist view, on the other hand, represented by the likes of Le Bon (1896), Sherif (1936), Levin (1947) and McDougall (1920) contends that there is something sui generis about group phenomena, something that cannot be explained by or reduced to intra-individual processes. Drawing on principles of Gestalt psychology, they argue that groups have emergent properties; that the individual is fundamentally transformed by participation in the group.

One area where this dispute has played out is in relation to social influence – the sense in which people’s perceptions, beliefs and attitudes are influenced by those around them. The traditional view is that individuals are motivated to hold accurate and valid beliefs about their world; that people seek what Festinger (1950) termed ‘subjective validity’. According to Festinger there are two means of achieving this subjective validity: physical reality testing and social reality testing. Physical reality testing is where we directly observe the world and rely upon the evidence of our own perceptive and cognitive faculties to achieve an accurate understanding of reality. But when direct perception is either unavailable, or the evidence of our own perception is ambiguous, we resort to social reality testing where we rely on the views of others to apprehend reality and establish subjective validity. The individualistic slant of this theory stems from
the fact that direct individual perception and cognition is regarded as sovereign and given primary status. Validation achieved through checking and matching the views of others is accorded a secondary status; it is seen as less valid, less reliable. To the extent that individuals’ views are influenced by those around them, it is only as a last resort when they cannot make objective determinations on their own.

This process was demonstrated in Sherif’s (1936) seminal autokineses studies. In these studies, participants sat alone in a darkened room and were asked to focus on a dot of light projected on the wall. Although the dot was stationary, an optical illusion (known as autokinesis) means that the dot of light appears to move and participants were asked to estimate how far it had moved. Participants tended to give varying estimates on the initial trials, but over time would settle on a personal norm. For some participants, this norm was quite large, for others it was quite small – that is, they each established their own reference point. In the next stage of the study participants were again brought into the darkened room and repeated the same procedure, but this time they did so in groups with each participant announcing their estimate out loud. Sherif found that participants’ initial estimates in this second stage were consistent with those they had made in the first, which were often quite different from each other. Over a series of trials, however, their estimates converged on a group norm to the point where they essentially came to agree on how much the dot was moving.

This research offers a classic illustration of social reality testing where an ambiguous situation, in which people are unsure of their own judgement, leads them to look to others for guidance as to what is appropriate. Interestingly, Sherif found that the consensus estimate persisted even when participants were again
tested alone, suggesting that they had internalized the norm. Later research by Jacobs and Campbell (1961), in which confederates were used to generate an extreme norm, found that this norm persisted even when the confederates were gradually replaced with genuine participants.

While participants in Sherif’s studies ultimately conformed to the group norm, this is not to say that they did so in response to perceived group pressure, or out of mindless compliance. Rather, the dominant interpretation was that this conformity was the result of a rational process where the views of others were used to develop a shared frame of reference that gave meaning and structure to an otherwise ambiguous situation. It follows that people would only rely on the views of others and conform to group norms to the extent that they were personally uncertain. People would not go along with others when there was no ambiguity.

To test this idea, Asch (1951) devised an experimental paradigm known as the ‘line judgment studies’. In these studies, participants (who thought they were taking part in a study of visual discrimination) were asked to look at a line projected on a screen and then call out one by one which of three comparison lines was the same length as the original. The study was conducted in groups of seven to nine, with only one person being a genuine participant - the rest being confederates who were instructed to give the wrong answer on specific trials. The genuine participant always responded second to last so they had heard the judgement of others before calling out their own. The task was designed to be as unambiguous as possible so that participants would not need to rely on others. Indeed, in a control study in which people performed the task privately, less than one percent of participants gave incorrect responses, confirming that the task was
not at all difficult. The results of the actual study, however, were quite different. Asch found that three quarters of participants went along with the incorrect judgement of the confederates in at least one of the 12 trials, and 50 percent went along with the others on at least half the trials. Rather than being immune to influence, the results indicate that many participants conformed to the views of others even when those views were in direct conflict with the evidence of their own senses. Far from reflecting a rational process, the findings suggested a form of social influence based on craven, or, at best, mindless conformity to perceived group pressure.

These findings caused quite a stir in the field of social psychology and led theorists to draw a sharp distinction between two forms of social influence. This distinction has many instantiations, but is perhaps best encapsulated in Deutsch and Gerard’s (1955) dual process theory of social influence which distinguishes between informational influence and normative influence. According to the theory, informational influence, which is akin to Festinger’s social reality testing, is motivated by the desire to accurately understand the world; to achieve subjective validity. It involves reliance on the views of others when we are uncertain about the appropriate judgement or response. Informational influence leads to genuine, private acceptance of the views of others; people are guided by the norm because they consider it to be informative about reality. It is, above all, a rational process. Normative influence, on the other hand, is conceived as mere public compliance to the prevailing group norm in an attempt to gain approval or to avoid sanction. As such, it is not thought to be true influence since it does not involve genuine acceptance or internalization of the norm. Unlike informational influence, this type of influence is considered to be inherently irrational.
A similar dual-process model is evident in the dominant theories of persuasion such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty, Cacioppo, Strathman & Priester, 2005) and the Systematic-Heuristic Model (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken, 1987; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Both of these theories distinguish between the genuine, long-lasting attitude change that results from careful processing of persuasive messages, and a more superficial process that produces ephemeral shifts in attitude. At the heart of these theories is a distinction between a thoughtful, rational process of persuasion where people weigh the evidence objectively and are convinced only by strong, valid arguments. This type of persuasion is seen as an asocial process where information is abstracted from the social context in which it is encountered. Indeed, one’s place in the social world is thought to have no bearing on the individual’s thinking since information is evaluated objectively, according to the standards of evidence and logic.

This is contrasted with an alternative form of persuasion that is neither rational nor objective. According to these models, when people lack either the requisite motivation or ability to process information carefully, they rely upon peripheral cues or heuristics including the extent to which the message reflects the norm of a valued group, or comes from an ingroup source. According to this view, the extent to which social factors such as group norms and group memberships weigh upon persuasion reflects the absence of careful, rational processing.

These dual-process models, both in the area of social influence and persuasion, reflect a meta-theroretical view of individual cognition that sees people as cognitive misers (e.g. Fiske & Taylor, 1984). From this perspective, the use of social information, be it in the form of group stereotypes or group norms, represents cognitive short-cuts that are used in order to preserve cognitive
resources. They may enable more efficient thinking, but they inevitably lead to distortions. While this is still the dominant view within social psychology, it is by no means universally accepted. It has been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds by those with a more interactionist view of the relationship between the individual and the group, and on group influence. Turner (1985; 1991), for example, rejected the dual process model of social influence and, in particular, the sharp distinction between the rational process of informational influence and the irrational process of normative influence. He argued that the distinction between seeking accurate information about reality, and wanting to understand the views of similar others was a false one; that individual perception and consensual validation are in fact interdependent elements of a single process.

In rejecting the dual-process model, Turner proposed a single-process theory of social influence known as referent informational influence. The theory is based on the notion that we regard people who are similar to ourselves as valid sources of information about reality (or at least about matters relevant to the basis of this similarity). We both expect to agree with similar others and are motivated to do so. From this perspective, being a member of the same group as another person, rather than being a source of coercive pressure, in fact provides the basis for validation of our own perceptions and beliefs. That is, the agreement of similar others lends a sense of objectivity to our subjective judgements. Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010) describe the referent informational influence approach as follows:

“We can only establish the validity of our collective beliefs in collaboration with others who we categorise as similar to ourselves. Hence, fellow group members serve as essential reference points for our own perception. Our reliance on them is not in conflict with our
concern for reality – it is through them that individual views are co-ordinated and transformed into shared values, beliefs and behaviours that have an objective quality” (p. 53).

Essentially, this view suggests that in seeking to establish subjective validity it is only natural for us to look to others with whom we share particular relevant characteristics in order to validate our own judgement. On matters of religion, for example, we might look to people of the same religious denomination; on matters of politics, to those who support the same political party. The influence that follows is no less real or lasting because it stems from a common group membership. Indeed, to the extent that a particular view is perceived to reflect the consensus position (i.e. the norm) of a relevant reference group, it is likely to be all the more influential. Turner claimed that a single-process model of social influence was necessary given the inherent contradictions of the prevailing approach. “The difficulty with the dual-process models,” he argued, “are the implications that social norms have no effect on private attitude change and that informational influence is non-normative” (1991, p. 147).

This theory of group-based social influence is firmly based in the interactionist view of the relationship between the individual and the group. In particular, it grew out of the social identity tradition (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al, 1987) which is based on the notion that we can define ourselves in terms of what makes us unique from other individuals (personal identity), or in terms of our membership in social groups (social identity). One of the key insights of this tradition is that social identity is not a sublimation or distortion of one’s true identity, rather it is just as valid an expression of selfhood as personal identity. The concept of social identity helps provide a bridge between the personal and the social, the individual and the group. Indeed, as Turner (1982)
argued, “social identity is the cognitive mechanism that makes group behaviour possible” (p. 21).

The original social identity theory of intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), as the name suggests, was principally concerned with the relations between groups. Broader questions of how we come to define ourselves in terms of group memberships, and which group membership in particular, were subsequently addressed by self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1985; Turner, et al. 1987), which provides a more cognitive analysis of group processes. According to this theory, the extent to which a particular social identity becomes salient (i.e. perceived as self-defining) at any given time results from the interaction of the individual’s propensity to assume a particular identity, and the extent to which that identity fits the social context. As Oakes (1987) explains, the concept of fit involves two interrelated factors: comparative fit and normative fit. Comparative fit reflects the extent to which a particular identity minimizes the differences within categories while at the same time maximizing the differences between categories. Normative fit is defined by the degree to which the actual differences between categories (and the similarities within them) accord with normative expectations. In a group discussion, for example, one would be more likely to define themselves and others in terms of gender to the extent that the women among the group tended to be in dispute with the men, while the men and women also tended to agree among themselves (comparative fit). Similarly, gender identity would be salient to the extent that the women’s views tended towards a pro-feminist position, and the men’s towards a more anti-feminist position (normative fit).

While the particulars of the social context have a large bearing on which identity becomes salient, it is not solely dictated by the stimulus; salience is also
influenced by aspects of the individual: their prior expectations, their memories, knowledge, habits, as well as their goals, values, and their theories about the way the social world is organised (Turner & Oakes, 1989). That is, salience depends on an individual perceiver’s readiness to apply a particular categorisation. For example, a feminist may have a high propensity to perceive and analyse the social world in terms of gender categories. A Marxist, on the other hand, might be more likely to view the world (indeed, potentially the same social contexts) in terms of class differences, while a devout Christian may be inclined to categorise themselves and others along denominational lines, or in terms of believers and non-believers. Because it derives in part from the social context and the principles of comparative and normative fit, the way individuals define their sense of self is potentially variable and fluid. That is not to say, however, that it is in a constant state of flux. Individuals’ readiness to use particular categories to define themselves and others places an important constraint on this variability. Indeed, as Haslam (2001) argues, “people organise and construe the world in ways that reflect the groups to which they belong and in this way their social histories lend stability and predictability to experience” (p. 52).

When a particular social identity is the basis for self-definition it leads to a process of depersonalization where people come to see themselves as relatively interchangeable with other members of the ingroup and as distinct from members of other groups. It is the propensity to see themselves as relatively interchangeable with others that leads people to expect to agree with ingroup members and to actively strive to reach consensus (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty & Reynolds, 1998), thus opening the way for social influence. In outlining his theory of group-based social influence, Turner (1987) argued that the degree of mutual influence
between people is a product of four factors: (1) the degree to which they perceive themselves to be similar in ways relevant to the matter at hand; (2) the degree to which they are perceived to be responding to the same stimulus or situation; (3) the extent of perceived disagreement about the matter at hand (subjective uncertainty); and (4) the degree to which being right on this particular matter is deemed to be important to the group.

In other words, this approach suggests that social influence derives from the expectation that we will agree with similar (i.e. interchangeable) others about the same stimulus situation. Their agreement validates our own responses as reflecting the objective qualities of the stimulus, rather than our own biases and idiosyncrasies (Turner, 1987). However, if agreement with those deemed similar to ourselves leads to subjective certainty, it follows that disagreement will lead to subjective uncertainty. Where disagreement occurs people will be motivated to reduce this subjective uncertainty by either: changing their views to bring them in line with the similar others; attributing the disagreement to differences in the stimulus situation; or recategorising the others as an outgroup (Haslam, 1997). To this, one could add the possibility that people will redefine the issue or the subject of the disagreement as something that is not relevant to the group, something that group members would not necessarily be expected to agree upon. For example, if a Christian finds themselves at odds with other Christians about the importance of dealing with climate change, they might: (a) change their own view; (b) assume their understanding of climate change differs from that of other Christians; or (c) re-categorise either themselves or those they disagree with as other than Christian. They may also, however, conclude that climate change is not relevant to what it means to be Christian; that it does not implicate any values that Christians hold.
dear and is therefore an issue on which it is appropriate, indeed only natural, for Christians to hold differing views.

This understanding of social influence as being driven by the expectation of agreement with similar others and the motivation to reduce subjective uncertainty in the event of disagreement leads to a re-evaluation of the results of Asch’s (1951) line judgement studies. Asch interviewed participants after the study to ascertain why they went along with the obviously incorrect judgements of the group. While some acknowledged that they knew the group consensus was wrong but conformed simply to avoid standing out, many others said that the disagreement of others led them to feel uncertain and to question their own judgement. For these participants, conformity wasn’t the result of a craven tendency to bow to group pressure, but the product of a genuine attempt to understand why their own judgement differed from those of others with whom they expected to agree. Indeed, if one considers the situation facing the participants, and just how vexing the unanimous disagreement of the rest of the group must have been, it is only natural that they would have at least considered the possibility that they themselves were in error. In the end, in order to make sense of the situation, many sincerely came to suspect that their own perception must have been wrong. Viewed in this light, we see that group influence need not be considered a passive, mindless process of conformity, but can in fact be the result of a considered, rational effort to make sense of the world.

Empirical support for this view comes from a number of sources, including research by Mackie and colleagues on what is known as the ingroup persuasion effect. This effect describes the common finding that messages from ingroup sources tend to be more persuasive (i.e. produce more attitude change).
than messages from outgroup sources. Mackie, Worth and Asuncion (1990) ran a study in which participants read a persuasive message on the topic of student exams that was either strong or weak, and attributed to either ingroup or outgroup sources. As noted above, the dominant models in the persuasion literature view the ingroup persuasion effect as the product of peripheral or heuristic processing. According to this view, people don’t actively process ingroup messages, they simply accept them because they like or identify with the source. While Mackie and colleagues did find evidence of the ingroup persuasion effect, with ingroup messages producing more persuasion than outgroup messages, they also found that participants were much more persuaded by strong messages from the ingroup than weak messages. Far from accepting the ingroup message in a mindless, heuristic fashion, this suggested that participants had carefully and systematically evaluated the ingroup messages, and were only persuaded by those independently pretested as being based on strong and valid arguments.

A second study by Mackie and colleagues provided further insight into the processing of information from fellow group members. As in the first study, participants read messages from either ingroup members or outgroup members that were either strong or weak. This time, however, the researchers added another variable: the degree to which the issue was relevant to the group. In one condition, the message related to an issue (oil drilling off a nearby coastline) that pretesting suggested was particularly relevant to the ingroup, while in the other condition the message referred to an issue that was considered much less relevant (acid rain in a distant part of the country). They found that on the issue that was relevant to the group, participants were persuaded to a much greater extent by ingroup messages with strong rather than weak arguments. However, on the issue that was not
relevant to the group they found that participants were somewhat persuaded by ingroup messages regardless of their strength. There was no evidence that participants were persuaded by outgroup messages regardless of whether they were weak or strong. These results qualify those of the earlier study, indicating that ingroup membership can lead to systematic processing of messages when the issue is deemed relevant to the group. Yet when it is not relevant to the group, ingroup membership can indeed be used as a heuristic cue.

Later research by Wyer (2010) confirmed the critical role that the relevance of the issue to the group plays in the ingroup persuasion effect. In a series of studies, Wyer found evidence of the ingroup persuasion effect only in cases where there was direct relevance of the issue to the group. In addition to measuring attitude change, Wyer also measured participants’ cognitive responses to persuasive messages, finding that positive responses to messages from ingroup members on issues relevant to the group mediated attitude change. This, according to Wyer, indicated that persuasion was “based on systematic processing of the message rather than reliance on cues such as the group membership of the message source” (p. 463).

The impact of relevance has also been demonstrated in research on the consistency between attitudes and behaviour intentions. Following on from research showing that referent group norms are related to behavioural intentions, Smith and colleagues found that ingroup norms have more influence when the issue is seen as relevant to the group. Indeed, they concluded that, “certain norms are linked more closely to the group prototype and may become more definitive of group membership” (Smith, Terry, Crosier & Duck, 2005, p. 168). Again, this suggests that while groups and group identity can have a powerful impact on
people’s perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour, people will not be guided by ingroup norms on every conceivable issue. The fact that people are more likely to be guided by group norms and influenced by ingroup messages on issues perceived to be relevant or central to group membership suggests that there is a rational basis to group-based social influence. It also highlights that the notion of relevance depends upon people’s understanding of the group and of the issue at hand.

This chapter has outlined some of the theoretical and empirical currents in the study of social influence. It has explored how key studies in the field of social psychology have informed the social identity perspective on social influence. This chapter has reviewed evidence that group-based social influence can follow from a deliberative, rational process and lead to genuine influence, rather than merely public compliance. It has also outlined research to demonstrate the extent to which group-based social influence is dependent upon the issue in question being perceived as relevant to the group, a theme that will be explored further in subsequent chapters.
Chapter 3 – The strategic use of identity arguments

The fact that each of us has a range of different group or social identities that may be salient at a given time – that may be seen as relevant when considering a given issue – has dramatic implications for individuals’ attitudes and the way they might be influenced. To the extent that the normative position of these different groups are perceived to differ on a particular issue, we could expect very different attitudes and behaviours depending on how people understand the issue and which group identity they therefore view as relevant. Reicher (2004), for instance, notes that an issue like the influx of migrants into low paid jobs could be construed as a matter of race, of nation, or of class. An individual’s attitude towards the issue, and indeed towards the migrant group in question or immigration more generally, could vary markedly depending upon this act of construal.

Work by Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b; Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a; Reicher and Hopkins, 2001b; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010) on the strategic construction of identity demonstrates that judgements about the relevance of group membership to particular issues, and about the alignment of group norms with particular issue positions are not made by individuals in ascetic isolation. In public debate, as in everyday conversation, we are bombarded with messages about the meaning of groups, of issues, and of the implications of one for the other. That is, the intra-psyche processes of perceiver readiness and fit are not the only factors that influence the salience of social identities, or judgements
about whether a particular group is relevant to this or that issue. There is also the dimension of discourse, argumentation and social influence. Indeed, contest over the meaning of groups and issues is often the very stuff of politics.

Reicher and colleagues’ investigation of the centrality of identity and self-category arguments in public debate is firmly grounded in the social identity perspective and the principles of self-categorisation theory in particular. However, there are a few important points of difference where they take issue with the dominant practices or approach of social identity researchers. Firstly, they argue that most research within the social identity tradition has tended to focus on the consequences of categorisation into groups with little or no attention devoted to how those categorisations are arrived at. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) cite the example of Sherif’s ‘boys camp studies’ in which the experimenters manipulated the structural relationship between groups of boys in order to study its effect on intergroup conflict (Sherif, 1966; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif, 1961). They refer to one of the lesser known of these studies in which the two groups of boys recognised that the experimenters were conspiring to manufacture conflict between them. As a result, rather than turn on each other, the two groups united in opposition to the experimenters. Sherif abandoned the study at the point that the boys rejected the experimenters’ group categorisation in favour of one that reflected their new understanding of the situation. Reicher and Hopkins suggest that because Sherif saw the “division into different groups of boys as a non-negotiable starting point, he ignored the issue of category construction. He ignored any alternative categorical possibilities” (p. 394).

According to Reicher and Hopkins (2001a), Sherif’s approach is indicative of a general tendency for researchers to take certain groups and categorisations for
granted, concentrating on the effects of those categorisations rather than investigating the process that gives rise to them. “The ways in which the divisions come about lie before the starting line and therefore slip from the disciplinary spotlight” (p. 394). While acknowledging the value of investigating the impact of these categorisations, they argue that intergroup research that assumes particular self-categories only tells part of the story. Reicher and Hopkins pay tribute to the important contribution of social identity research to our understanding of racism, for example, but claim that a focus on the consequences of racial prejudice has not been accompanied by an attempt to understand ‘racialization’; of how race came to be a basis of identification and discrimination.

In line with the social identity perspective, Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues reject the social cognitive view of people as ‘cognitive misers’ who use categorical thinking to represent people in the social world when they lack the capacity to represent them as unique individuals. Rather, they contend that people categorise themselves and others in terms of social groups because this is often how the social world is organised. Such thinking helps to render the social world more meaningful; it reflects rather than distorts social reality. However, while acknowledging the critical role of social context in determining identity salience, or, more broadly, the categories and category relations that come to define social reality, they go beyond the standard social identity analysis in a couple of ways. In contrast to most social identity theorists, for instance, Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues also emphasise the interdependent relationship between categories and context – that the construction of social categories can influence social reality. In effect, Reicher and Hopkins chart something of a third way, one that goes beyond both the social cognition view that people use group-based categories to simplify
the complex social world, and the self-categorisation notion that emphasises the flexible nature of categorisation in response to the changing social context. While acknowledging that the social categories available to people at a given moment are to some degree determined, or at least constrained, by the social context, they also stress the role that social categories play in shaping the social context given that “all self-categories are theories of how the world works and how one can be in such a world” (2001a, p. 398).

Much of their work in this area has focused on the key role that nationalism and nation-based categorisation has had on the development of nation-states. “… To see oneself in national terms is both to conceive of the world as organised into nations and to occupy a particular place in that world of nations” (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, p. 398). However, the same is true of any other social category. Their main point is that almost invariably, social change to advance the interests of a particular group is predicated on the promulgation of that group as a distinct category in the social world. This accords with work on politicised collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) which suggests that awareness of shared grievances among a group, and attributing those grievances to a specific outgroup helps foster the type of ‘us vs them’ frame on which collective political mobilization to effect social change is based. In other words, social categorisation is a necessary step in the consciousness raising process that leads to real changes in social reality. Reicher and Hopkins (2001a) argue that while this has been acknowledged in theory (e.g. Haslam, 2000) it has rarely been addressed in practice. Subsequent research by Livingstone and Haslam (2008) in the context of intergroup conflict in Northern Ireland, however, demonstrated the critical importance of category content in creating social reality. They found that the
relationship between past experiences of intergroup conflict and negative behavioural intentions towards the outgroup is mediated by the content of ingroup identity. That is, past experience of intergroup conflict only predicts future conflict to the extent that it leads group members to define ingroup identity in terms of conflict with the outgroup.

Based on this understanding of the interdependent relationship between category boundaries, identity content and social context, Reicher and Hopkins (2001a) argue that the traditional social identity approach has neglected the extent to which people will use group categorisations strategically, not merely to make sense of the social world, but to actively shape it. They claim that, “… a proper understanding of salience demands that we study the subject as an active participant in debate and social struggle rather than as simply a passive processor of information” (p. 309). That is, Reicher and Hopkins do not simply see the social context or frame of reference as an objective field from which category salience is deduced. Rather, they stress the agency of individuals and groups in determining how the social context is defined and construed. Precisely because of the potential for social categories to transform social reality, they argue that those who seek to shape public opinion and mobilise groups of people to a common cause need to be adept at manipulating people’s sense of selfhood; they need to be what Reicher calls entrepreneurs of identity.

“Our identities are no longer impressed upon us from an external reality. Identities may better be seen as projects, and those with different projects will propose different versions of their own identities and that of others… Those who seek to influence their peers and who aspire to direct the masses need to become entrepreneurs of identity before they can be leaders of people” (Reicher, 2004, p. 53).
Entrepreneurs of identity in practice

While Reicher and Hopkins offer a compelling theoretical case for the central role identity can play in political movements, they have also sought to demonstrate how entrepreneurs of identity use identity arguments in order to create, persuade and mobilise constituencies. In a series of studies, they have detailed real world examples of how those involved in public debate (a) define the boundaries of a particular category to include all those they want to mobilise; (b) define the content of the category such that their proposals are portrayed as the fulfillment of group norms; and, (c) define themselves as prototypical of the group such that they are uniquely placed to lead and influence the membership. Each of these dimensions is important in understanding how aspects of social identity are used strategically to achieve mass social influence.

In one example, Reicher and Hopkins (1996a) analysed a speech by David Alton, a British MP and anti-abortion campaigner, to a group of medical staff and students at a Scottish hospital. The key to Alton’s pitch was to broaden the frame of reference around the abortion debate beyond the traditional pro-choice vs. pro-life categories. Alton placed the pro-choice position in a broader societal context, linking it to a culture of selfishness and a fixation on individual rights (such as the right to pollute) regardless of the consequences for others. He contrasted this by defining the pro-life position on the basis of “concern for the unborn child” and linking it with a “concern for the environment, for animal welfare”. On the basis of this construction, Alton was able to draw upon the normative content of the medical profession as ‘caring’ to argue that abortion was a violation of those norms. By expanding the frame of reference for the debate to incorporate other issues and positions, Alton was able to challenge the common conception of anti-
abortion activists as ‘reactionary cranks’, while also challenging the conception of the pro-choice position. As Reicher and Hopkins describe it, “if the abortion vs. anti-abortion debate involves those who are selfish/unprincipled vs. those who are caring/principled, then clearly medical staff are in the latter category” (p. 304).

In another example, Reicher and Hopkins (1996b) examined the differing constructions of a single issue (the British miner’s strike of 1984-85) by two opposing politicians: then Conservative Prime Minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher, and Labour opposition leader Neil Kinnock. As the authors explain, Thatcher, who was seeking to mobilise the public against the strike, defined the issue in the context of a struggle between democracy on one side and violent extremists on the other – there had been an IRA bomb attack on the conference venue in the early hours of the morning of Thatcher’s speech, killing a number of delegates and injuring many others. Among the ingroup category opposed to the strike she included the party members and delegates in attendance, and the general British public, including miners who continued to work, as well as the striking miners, many of whom she claimed were opposed to the strike. She characterised this group in terms of common British attributes and values such as respect for order, freedom, self-reliance, courage and steadfastness in the face of threat. In constructing the opposing category, she assimilated the executive of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), who were leading the strike, with other forces opposed to democracy and the rule of law such as IRA terrorists and even the government of Argentina with whom Britain had recently waged war over the Falklands/Malvinas islands. In the context of this construction, as Reicher and Hopkins suggest, “it is normative not only to oppose the strike but also to show resolve and commitment in actively standing up against the strike” (p. 364).
Kinnock, on the other hand, was seeking to galvanise support for the striking miners and foment opposition to the government. He set the dispute in the context of the negative effects of Thatcher’s policies, including cuts to welfare, unemployment and civil disorder. Within this context, he defined the striking miners as representative of a broad ingroup who had been afflicted by and were opposed to Thatcherism. Unlike Thatcher, Kinnock didn’t invoke the national category explicitly, nor did he define the categories in class terms. Indeed, he was quite deliberate in his efforts to include within the ingroup exemplars beyond the traditional working class. The authors suggest that Kinnock’s ingroup could be defined as ‘the people’ in the radical sense as being distinct from the monopolisers of political representation and power. He characterised this ingroup as valuing liberty, compassion, care and opportunity; as being concerned with the welfare and cohesion of society. In Kinnock’s construction, the outgroup was systematically whittled down to just the personage of Thatcher herself. Even her cabinet colleagues were described as not so much supportive but as simply too meek to resist her. “The category ‘Thatcherism’ is therefore reduced to the will of one person” (p. 367). Indeed, Kinnock went so far as to place Thatcherism outside the bounds of the usual partisan categories such that she was not even representative of the party or political tradition she led. Her’s was a different form of Toryism, one that “is exhumed from the past.” Kinnock defined Thatcher, in contrast to the ingroup, as “coercive and dictatorial, arrogant, vain, prejudiced, out of touch and contemptuous of ordinary people” (p. 368).

As the juxtaposition of these two speeches demonstrates, the way in which the issue is characterised, the categories that are posited to be involved, and the way those categories are defined differ in such a way as to advance the
contrasting political causes advanced by the different speakers. Thus, it is not simply that political rhetoric involves arguments about which groups are relevant to an issue and how the groups are defined. These arguments are also internally coherent and serve a strategic purpose in persuading an audience that one particular course or action is consonant with the interests and values of a common ingroup, while at the same time discrediting alternatives. As Reicher and Hopkins explain, Thatcher’s frame of ‘democracy against terrorism’, her definition of the ingroup as British and as defined on the basis of resoluteness and courage presents the strike as anathema to its values; Kinnock’s frame of ‘Thatcherism against society’ portrays the ingroup as ‘the people’, whose values of care, compassion and solidarity naturally lead them to support the strike. This demonstrates the authors’ notion that “category constructs in political rhetoric reflect a speaker’s project of mobilization” (p. 369).

Reicher and Hopkins have also examined how national identity (predominantly in the context of Scottish politics) has been used by activists of various stripes to advance very different political agendas. In the context of the debate about Scottish independence from Great Britain, for example, Reicher and Hopkins (2001a) describe how a Scottish National Party (SNP) activist characterises the Scots as shy and reticent, in contrast to the garrulous English. Meanwhile, a Conservative politician depicts the Scots as naturally expressive. For the SNP activist, the picture of Scots as shy and somewhat downtrodden reinforces the need for Scottish independence from England in order to assert and pursue their own interests. The Conservative politician’s portrayal, on the other hand, suggests that any seeming tendency on the part of Scots to complain about
their position in Great Britain is more a result of their expressive bearing than the fact that they have anything to complain about.

They also describe an instance where two political candidates from opposing parties, Labour and Conservative, both refer to a famous line from Scottish poet Robert Burns – “a man’s a man for a’ that” in discussing the caring and communal nature of the Scots. However, the apparent similarity disguises the contrasting projects the allusion is being used for. For the Labour politician, the Scots’ caring and communal nature is used to justify support for the welfare state; for the Conservative, it is used to justify mutual self-help and personal charity as an alternative to social welfare. They also cite other examples where activists from the same party make very different arguments about the distinction between Scots and the English: one Labour activist claims that the Scots’ caring nature distinguishes them from the English, while another argues that the Scots and English are essentially one and the same people (Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997).

The point of these examples is not merely to demonstrate that identity is a prominent feature of political rhetoric, but also to show that identity arguments are used strategically in order to underpin the political project of the speaker. It may be unremarkable that people representing different political traditions will draw upon similar conceptions of national identity, or that people with similar ideals may vary. However, the fact that these differences and similarities appear to vary in line with the political argument the speaker is trying to advance attests to how identity is used for strategic purpose. Indeed, in all of the cases cited above, the unifying factor is that the definition of Scottishness serves to underpin the prototypicality of the speaker’s party, and position a particular policy or their
party’s platform as consonant with the national character. However, as Reicher and Hopkins (1996b) themselves note, it is one thing to demonstrate that category arguments are present in political rhetoric and that differing construction of issues and groups are used in order to achieve mass influence; it is quite another to demonstrate their effect.

Empirical research within the social identity tradition has demonstrated the powerful influence the frame of reference exerts on the way people understand themselves and others. For example, in a demonstration of the principle of comparative fit, Haslam and colleagues showed that expanding the range of groups in the social context had a marked effect on perceptions of group boundaries, with erstwhile outgroup members being redefined as part of a common ingroup (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, McGarty & Hayes, 1992). Likewise, Hopkins, Regan and Abell (1997) demonstrated the relative nature of group definitions, showing that the way the ingroup was defined, including the dimension of definition, varies depending upon who the salient outgroup is. This was taken a step further by Rabinovich, Morton, Postmes and Verplanken (2012) who demonstrated that changes in the comparative context (i.e. salient outgroup) can influence perceptions of the ingroup norms on a particular issue, and ultimately influence individuals’ attitudes and behaviour regarding that issue. While these studies illustrate the influence that can be achieved by manipulating people’s understanding of the social context, in each case the social context was tightly controlled and directly manipulated by the experimenter. As such, they offer only limited insight into how such influence is achieved in the context of public debate, where those who seek to shape public opinion on a given issue must present their particular interpretation of the social context, the nature of
groups and of the issue in ways that are plausible and compelling to those they seek to influence.

This chapter has outlined work by Reicher, Hopkins and others on how identity arguments are used to persuade and mobilise groups of people to a common cause. It explains how this work builds on the social identity perspective on social influence to offer novel insights into rhetorical strategies at play in much public debate. While experimental work in the field of social psychology compliments Reicher and colleagues’ more qualitative analysis, it is in the communication and political science literature, most notably work on issue framing and partisan cues, where we find a more thorough empirical examination of the effect of public discourse on individuals’ attitudes.
Chapter 4 – Issue frames, party cues, and the meaning of issues and groups

The way in which issues are defined or ‘framed’ in public debate and the impact this has on people’s attitudes is the subject of considerable interest in the fields of political science and communication. Research into what is known as ‘issue framing’ is based on the notion that issues can be complex and there is often ambiguity about what the essence of an issue is. According to Nelson and Kinder (1996), issue frames are more than a single argument or a position on an issue, they provide meaning to an issue and suggest how to understand and think about it. Issue frames are thought to influence attitudes on three levels: by making new beliefs or considerations about an issue available; by making particular available considerations more accessible; or by making certain accessible considerations seem more applicable or more important in determining one’s attitude (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Despite debate over the exact process by which framing effects are mediated, there is general agreement that issue frames change attitudes by altering the underlying considerations people bring to bear in forming their attitudes (see Nelson, Oxley & Clawson, 1997; Nelson & Oxley, 1999; Jacoby, 2000; Druckman, 2001).

This understanding of issue framing is based on an expectancy value model of attitudes (e.g. Azjen & Fishbein, 1980), according to which an individual’s attitude towards an object or issue can be thought of as the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs. In the classic example, attitudes about whether a hate group rally should be allowed to proceed might consist of a positive evaluation based on the principle of free speech and a negative evaluation based on concerns about public safety. One’s overall attitude would depend on the
relative weight ascribed to each of these components. Two people could share the same range of considerations and evaluations, but attach differing weights to each and thereby arrive at different conclusions. Someone exposed to a frame emphasising the free speech element might be more likely to see this as the most relevant consideration and conclude that the rally should proceed. Whereas someone who read an article that framed the issue in terms of public safety might be more likely to oppose the rally on the basis of this consideration.

Research on framing effects traditionally rests on an individualistic understanding of attitudes, characterised by Hogg and Smith (2007) as “cognitive representations that are acquired and possessed by individuals and which, to a great extent, are a part of human individuality” (p. 91). This has been the accepted view of attitudes within social psychology as far back as Floyd Allport (1919) and continues to dominate the field (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Maio & Haddock, 2009). While framing research considers the impact of social context on attitudes, as a source of information and communication, the social identity perspective offers a broader understanding of the social context which Hogg and Smith (2007) conceptualise as the wider social environment of group memberships, group norms, social identities, intergroup relations and ideologies. In this sense, much research on framing follows a perspective that fails to take account of the way in which attitudes are grounded in group memberships; that “our sense of ourselves as group members plays a key role in shaping attitudes and attitudinal processes” (p. 91).

The individualistic bent in framing research is far from monolithic, and there have been some notable exceptions. Nelson and Kinder (1996) went some way towards integrating framing research with a more socially-based
understanding of attitude processes in investigating what they termed the ‘group
centrism’ of public opinion. They argued that people’s attitudes towards social
groups were fundamental to their opinions on a variety of issues, but that the
influence of this group-centrism depends on how issues are framed. In studies in
the US, they found that support for affirmative action was highly correlated with
racial attitudes, and particularly so when the issue was framed in a way that drew
attention to African Americans as the intended beneficiaries. While this research
is notable in recognising the key role of groups in shaping individual’s opinions
on specific issues, it goes only part of the way. In focusing on the impact of
attitudes towards groups, and particularly the role of racial prejudice, the
emphasis is on how the individual views and responds to ‘others’ in forming their
opinion, rather than on how one defines the ‘self’ in relation to the issue. While
self-categorisation is always relative (Hopkins, et al., 1997), and the self is
defined in relation to the ‘other’, from a social identity perspective the main point
of interest is how people view themselves, who they identify with, and the types
of values and norms they come to be guided by.

Price (1989) was the first to explicitly apply social identity principles in
attempting to understand the impact of framing on individual’s attitudes. Focusing
on the tendency for the media to frame issues in terms of conflict between
opposing sides, Price argued that “the construction of an issue as a matter pitting
defined social groups against one another is not a simple peripheral cue; it
interacts with recipients’ social identities to alter in a fundamental way their
approach to thinking about and responding to the issue” (p. 202). According to
Price, this type of framing influences attitudes firstly by indicating which groups
are relevant to the issue and secondly by outlining the norms of those groups. For
people formulating their opinion on the issue, this type of group conflict frame changes the question from one of ‘where do I stand?’ on the issue, to ‘with whom do I stand?’

In testing these ideas empirically, Price conducted a study in which participants read a mock article from a student newspaper about plans to increase university course requirements. In the group frame condition, the article described the issue in terms of the conflict between Science majors who opposed the move, and Humanities majors who supported it. In the other condition, the article noted that students were divided on the issue without mentioning any specific groups. The personal relevance of the issue was also manipulated by stating that the plan was to be implemented either soon, or in the future. The results indicated that Humanities students were influenced by the frame such that those who read the group conflict version of the article were more likely to support the planned increase in course requirement than those who read the non-group frame. However, this effect was evident only among those Humanities students who were told that the changes were to be implemented soon (i.e. high personal relevance). Science students, on the other hand, were not influenced by the frame regardless of the supposed timing, though Price suggests that this might have been due to constricted range as opposition to the plan was the default position of most students.

Price’s (1989) research demonstrates that when informed of a group norm on an issue, those who identify with the group tend to conform to the normative position. In this sense, the results are in line with those of the ingroup persuasion studies outlined above (e.g. Mackie et al, 1990; Wyer, 2010). Indeed, focusing on the results among Humanities students, the fact that the frame only had an effect
on those who believed the issue to be an imminent concern suggests that this might have heightened the sense of relevance of the issue to the group such that they saw their fellow ingroup members as an appropriate reference group.

The matter of relevance has been explored more recently in the field of political science through research looking at the conditions under which individuals will and will not be guided by group (i.e. political party) norms. Slothuus and de Vreese (2010), for example, found that participants were much more inclined to adopt the position advocated by the party they supported (and reject the position of an opposing party) on an issue where there was traditionally partisan conflict (welfare for senior citizens). However, on an issue that was usually characterised by partisan consensus (international trade), the source of the message had little or no impact on whether participants adopted the advocated position. Furthermore, they found that the influence of party source was stronger among those who were more politically aware. These findings confirm, in the realm of political attitudes, that while group memberships and group norms can exert a powerful influence on attitudes, people do not slavishly adhere to group norms in all instances. There are important situational and individual factors that have a bearing on the extent of group influence.

In explaining these results, the authors suggest that message source mattered more on the conflict issue because this is where partisan values are particularly at stake. This is another way of saying that the issue is relevant to group membership; that one’s stance on the issue is somehow central to what it means to be a group member. It follows, therefore, that people who are committed partisans will be swayed by the position of the ingroup. Equally, for those who receive the message about the outgroup position, it makes sense to assume that
this position will reflect the values of that party, which are at odds with one’s own. As such, people will naturally assume that their own party’s position will differ, and be motivated to react against the outgroup’s stated position. In contrast, issues where there is usually partisan consensus, do not, almost by definition, implicate partisan values and will therefore not be viewed as relevant to group membership. Given the expectation of consensus across groups, there is no reason to expect agreement within one’s group. As such, there is little or no motivation to adhere to the ingroup position or to reject the outgroup position.

These findings run counter to previous issue framing research which has suggested that citizens are likely to be more responsive to framing on issues that they are not particularly invested in, and that framing effects are stronger among those who are less politically aware (Kam, 2005; Mondak, 1993). They are, however, in keeping with the social identity perspective and associated evidence reviewed above that group-based influence is the product of effortful, rational processes. Indeed, Slothuus and de Vreese (2010) argue that “… parties appear to function as much more than merely facilitating cognitive efficiency – parties are important landmarks in the political landscape that citizens relate to” (p. 643). As such, it makes sense that it is the most politically aware in the context of politically relevant issues who will have both the motivation and ability to rationalise why they should support the ingroup position, or, for that matter, generate counterarguments to justify rejecting the outgroup position.

Similar results were found by Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus (2013) who investigated the effect of party cues under conditions of high and low partisan polarisation. They found that when the political context surrounding an issue (e.g. immigration reform in the US) was described as non-polarised (i.e. not
much difference between the parties, and differing views within parties),
participants, who were made up of committed Democrats and Republicans, were
swayed by the substantive merits of the arguments presented for or against a
particular policy rather than by the official position of their party. However, when
the political context was described as highly polarised (i.e. large difference
between the parties and a high level of agreement within parties), participants
conformed to the stated position of their party, regardless of the relative merits of
the arguments. As with earlier research, these results raise concerns about the
pernicious effects of partisanship on citizen decision-making and the quality of
public opinion. While acknowledging these concerns, the authors argue that
citizens, particularly those who are committed partisans, generally understand
what the political parties stand for and take this into account when determining
whether they should be guided by party cues. Indeed, just as in Slothuus and de
Vreese’ (2010) example of the partisan conflict issue, the polarised political
context indicates that the issue implicates the types of values that distinguish the
parties, and which are presumably important to committed partisans. So while a
participant may have been presented with information about the merits of the
policy that point in one direction, they will have to weigh this against the
knowledge that their political party (with whom they share relevant values) holds
a different view. In this case, it may be rational to assume that the party’s position
is based on a more thorough understanding of the policy.

The research on issue framing and particularly party cues is consistent
with that on ingroup persuasion (Mackie et al, 1990; Mackie et al, 1992; Wyer,
2010) in pointing to three distinct conclusions: (1) group norms can exert a
powerful influence on the attitudes of those who identity with the group; (2)
people are only influenced by group norms to the extent that they regard the issue in question to be relevant to the group; and (3) being guided by group norms is not simply the result of mindless conformity, but can be the outcome of a thoughtful, rational process.

In considering the nature of this rational process, Asch’s early work on persuasion offers some useful insights. Drawing on the principles of Gestalt psychology, Asch argued that the characteristics of the source are not simply something we add into the mix when considering a persuasive message; it actually influences the meaning we ascribe to the message. That is to say, it is not a matter of considering the same message from one or other source; they are actually two different messages because the content of the message and the source constitute a meaningful whole: a Gestalt. To illustrate this point, Asch (1952) replicated a study by Lorge (1936) where American students were presented with a message arguing that “a little rebellion now and then is a good thing…” attributed to either Vladimir Lenin or Thomas Jefferson. Not surprisingly there was more agreement with the message among those who thought it came from Jefferson rather than Lenin. Lorge’s interpretation was that the liking participants felt towards Jefferson was simply transferred to the message. But Asch also had students describe how they interpreted the term *rebellion* from the passage, finding that when attributed to Lenin rebellion brought to mind images of revolution, bloodshed and anarchy; whereas when attributed to Jefferson it was associated with debate and democracy, “gentle winds of change.” This was good evidence of Asch’s notion that the source affects the meaning of the message; that people’s interpretation of the message was based on their understanding of the source. They were indeed two different messages. And it is the interpretation of the message, the meaning
we give to it, not simply the objective qualities of the message itself, which determines whether we accept the message or reject it.

It was this understanding of attitudes and attitude change that Cohen (2003) brought to his investigation of party cues. In a series of studies with committed Democrats and Republicans, participants read a mock newspaper article about a proposed reform to welfare policy. In the article, the policy was either presented as being substantively generous or stringent. Half the participants read that the policy was supported by the majority of House Democrats, and opposed by the majority of Republicans, with the party labels being reversed for the other half. In line with other research, he found that partisans’ attitudes towards the issue were guided by the stated position of their party, even when their natural ideological inclination would suggest an alternative view. In the final study, conducted with Democrats only, participants read an article describing a government funded program that would “guarantee both job training and gainful employment … to poor people who receive welfare benefits and to those whose benefits have ended.” Half of the participants read that the Democrats opposed the program, but the Republicans supported it; the other half did not receive any information about the position of the two parties. In addition to reporting their attitude towards the program, participants were also asked to write an editorial outlining why they held that attitude. The results showed that participants who had read that the Democrats opposed the program were more likely to oppose it themselves, and in their editorials were more likely to emphasise humanitarian values over self-reliance in justifying their opposition. Participants who had not read about the party’s position were more likely to support the program and gave equal emphasis to humanitarianism and self-reliance in the editorials.
In keeping with Asch’s (1952) view of persuasion, Cohen interpreted these results on the basis that the information about the party position on the issue helped define what he referred to as the *social meaning* of the welfare program in the eyes of participants. In a sense, the party position and participants’ understanding of the nature of the party itself provided a ‘frame’ for interpreting the issue. So rather than forsaking their ideological beliefs, participants were interpreting the meaning of the program on the basis of the ideological beliefs or values they shared with their party. As Cohen explained, the Democrats in the United States define their ideological tradition on the basis of a dual commitment to the values of humanitarianism and self-reliance. For those who read the objective information, the program was viewed as reflecting both values. However, this interpretation was inconsistent with the Democrat’s opposition to the program. As such, those who read that the Democrats opposed the program interpreted it as violating the value of humanitarianism. This was how they made sense of the Democrat’s opposition. In line with Turner’s (1991) view of attitudes, Cohen (2003) argues that it is not simply the substantive, objective elements of an issue that determines attitudes, but rather the social meaning or what he describes as “the perceived ‘goodness’ of fit between the attitude object and socially shared values” (p. 809).

Cohen claims that there are two factors that affect the extent to which this process plays out. The first factor relates to the issue of relevance noted above - that the issue must be perceived as relevant to the group in the sense that it involves values that are central to group membership, that in some way define what the group stands for. If this is not the case, then people will not feel motivated to agree with the group position. The second factor is that the meaning
of the issue must be sufficiently ambiguous that it can be plausibly reframed on the basis of the group’s position. If, for example, the welfare program had been unambiguously both generous and self-enhancing for recipients, it would have been extremely difficult for participants to ascribe a social meaning to the program that squared with the Democrats’ opposition. To the extent that the Democrat’s opposition appeared inexplicable, based on the values that define the group Democrats, participants may well have dismissed the group’s position in their consideration of the policy (or indeed it may have led them to reconsider their view of the Democrats). In addition to these two factors (or perhaps implicit in them) is the extent to which there is ambiguity about what defines the group. The more ambiguous the group definition, the greater scope there is to interpret a diversity of positions as consistent with the group’s values. Indeed, to the extent that there is ambiguity, or plurality, in the values that define the group, the greater the range of issues that can potentially be construed as relevant to the group.

The research on issue framing and party cues suggests that issues are often multi-faceted and the social meaning people ascribe to them is open to manipulation. This social meaning can be manipulated either directly through explicit issue frames or indirectly through information about group norms. However, the same can be true about the social meaning (or content) of groups. There can be many features or values that define a group; many values can be seen as central to what it means to be a group member. To the extent that there is ambiguity about which of the various values is most relevant or definitive of the group, there is scope to shape the group definition by emphasising one over the alternatives. Doing so could fundamentally alter the extent to which a given issue
is seen as relevant to the group, and indeed what the group position on an issue might be.

Overview of current research

Based on the literature and research reviewed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, we can draw a number of key points that will inform the empirical element of this thesis. First, that people’s attitudes are influenced by the norms of groups they identify with, and particularly so for those who are strongly identified with the group. This is motivated by a desire to accurately understand the world and represents a rational process where people look to relevant others to lend a sense of validity and objectivity to their subjective judgements and attitudes. This caveat about ‘relevant’ others is critical: people only expect to agree, and only seek agreement with group members on issues that are relevant to the group. The perception that the issue implicates values that are relevant or central to what it means to be a group member provides the basis for the expectation of agreement and opens the way for social influence. If the issue is not perceived to be relevant to the group, then it is logical to assume that it is one on which group members could be expected to differ, and there is no motivation to be guided by the group.

The second point is that there is often a degree of ambiguity about the meaning of issues (i.e. what interests and values it entails), as well as the meaning or content ascribed to groups (i.e. what values or interests it represents). Most people have a range of groups with which they identify, and thus a range of groups that may be perceived as relevant to a given issue, depending on how the issue and the groups are construed. To the extent that these different groups are perceived to have different norms regarding an issue, an individual’s attitude
towards the issue could vary greatly depending on which group identity is seen to be relevant.

The third point stemming from the review of literature is that the meaning ascribed to both groups and issues are not simply determined by individual reflection, but can be influenced by the information and messages people encounter. Indeed, a great deal of public discourse involves rhetoric about the nature of issues and the nature of groups, which is designed to shape people’s attitudes. In many cases this rhetoric can be seen as an attempt to establish the relevance of an issue to a group (or a group to an issue) among the audience, such that attitudes of those who identify with the group come to align with group norms. While elements of this process have been demonstrated experimentally, and others have been explored through more qualitative analysis, we aim to contribute to the understanding of social influence by exploring the process by which rhetorical frames about issues and identities influence attitudes.

We will explore these ideas through four empirical studies. In the first two, we will attempt to manipulate the meaning of a group identity in order to establish its relevance to different types of issues. In the third and fourth studies, we will attempt to manipulate the meaning of a specific issue in order to establish the relevance to particular group identities. Studies 1 and 2 are set in the context of religious identity. Research consistently finds a connection between religiosity and conservative attitudes towards cultural issues (e.g. abortion, gay marriage), more so than other types of issues (Malka et al, 2012; Davis & Robinson, 1996; Guth et al, 2006; Jelen, 2009, Layman & Greene 2005). We argue that this is in part due to a social context that has prevailed in the United States, where most of this research has been conducted, in recent decades in which the dominant public
discourse is one in which religious and political leaders emphasise the relevance of cultural issues to religious identity, while giving much less emphasis to other issues (Wallis, 2005; Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2009). We therefore suggest that framing religious identity in a way that emphasises the relevance of cultural issues will enhance the normative influence on those issues, but equally, framing religious identity in a way that emphasises the relevance of civic issues will enhance the normative influence on those issues. In the first study, conducted with an Australian sample, we explore this through the use of a fairly simple identity frame that merely suggests that some people may see these issues as relevant to their religious identity. In Study 2, conducted with a sample drawn from the United Kingdom, we employ a more elaborate identity frame that seeks to explain why it is that cultural or civic issues are relevant to religious identity.

Studies 3 and 4 explore these processes in the context of attitudes towards the issue of climate change. The public debate about climate change is characterised by a range of different and competing frames. Many emphasise the moral imperative to act on climate change, while others highlight the economic costs of reducing emissions. Research indicates that attitudes toward the issue has come to be associated with the Culture war between different ideological groups, and attitudes towards climate change are partly an expression of commitment to those ideological groups (Kahan et al, 2012; Kahan, 2013; Kahan, 2015). We argue that this connection is likely driven by the nature of public discourse around climate change and that the social identity perspective offers a good way to understand these results. We therefore suggest that framing climate change in a way that resonates with the meaning ascribed to different types of groups will enhance the normative influence of those groups.
In Study 3, we explore this in relation to two issue frames commonly encountered in public discourse about climate change (moral and economic) to determine whether this increases the relevance and therefore normative influence of religious/spiritual and class groups, respectively, that participants identify with. In Study 4 we also include a political frame and explore the role of partisan group identity and norms, as well as examining the role of political knowledge which has been shown to moderate the effect of issue frames (Slohuus & de Vreese, 2010). In Study 4, we also explore the role of perceived relevance to the group and the extent to which this mediates the effect of the frame on attitudes towards climate change.
Chapter 5 – Context statement

**Title:** Render unto Caesar: Rhetorical construction of religious identity affects the influence of religious group norms on political attitudes.

**Student contribution:** Study design (in consultation with supervisor Mavor), implementation, data collection, data analysis, interpretation (in consultation with Mavor). Lead author on write-up.

**Publication outlet:** Political Psychology

**Publication status:** Preparing manuscript for submission.

Social psychological research on group-based social influence has shown that people’s attitudes are influenced by the norms of groups they identify with. However, this influence is limited to issues that are perceived as relevant to the group. Research in the communication and political science literature has shown that the way people understand issues, and in turn their attitudes towards those issues, can be influenced by the way the issue is framed in communication. This research seeks to combine the insights of these two bodies of research. More specifically, the two studies described in this chapter examine whether messages about the nature of a particular group can influence the extent to which different types of issues are seen as relevant to the group such that attitudes come to reflect the group’s norms.

This question is examined in the context of religious (in this case Christian) group identity. Research has consistently found a strong relationship between religiosity and conservative political attitudes regarding ‘cultural’ issues (e.g. abortion, gay rights). Based on the premise that the connection is driven to some degree by elite religious and political rhetoric that emphasises the relevance
of cultural issues, the studies described test whether messages about the nature of religious group identity influence the extent to which religious identity and norms predict attitudes towards cultural issues and civic issues (i.e. welfare, climate change, asylum seekers). This research applies the social identity approach to social influence in a more thorough and systematic way than has previously been done in the study of framing effects. Similarly, drawing on the social identity perspective on social influence is a novel approach in examining the association between religiosity and political attitudes.

The findings indicate that messages about the nature of religious identity and the issues relevant to it can influence the extent to which perceived religious group norms predict attitudes. These findings support the notion that elite religious rhetoric that emphasises conservative positions on cultural issues is at least partly responsible for the commonly found connection between religiosity and political conservatism. The results also suggests that such rhetoric can work to define what issues are, and are not, relevant to the religious identity and therefore the issues on which one should be guided by religious group norms. These findings contribute to our understanding of the impact of elite rhetoric, and in particular provide an insight into the social identity processes through which such rhetoric influences attitudes.
Render unto Caesar: Rhetorical construction of religious identity affects the influence of religious group norms on political attitudes.

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Abstract

Research on the intersection of religion and politics consistently finds a strong relationship between religiosity and conservative political attitudes, particularly on so-called cultural issues (e.g. abortion, gay marriage). Drawing on the social identity perspective on group-based social influence, we argue that the connection between religion and political attitudes is driven by a social context in which elite religious discourse emphasises the religious import of cultural issues over civic issues (e.g. welfare, climate change). Across two studies involving self-identified Christians, we predict that highlighting the relevance of either cultural or civic issues to religious identity (Study 1), or defining religious identity in terms of either family values or social justice (Study 2) will affect the extent to which religious group norms influence participants’ attitudes towards cultural and civic issues. Findings support the predictions and suggest that elite religious discourse influences attitudes towards specific issue by affecting which issues are seen as relevant to the group.

**Keywords:** Religion, political attitudes, social identity, social influence
Render unto Caesar: Rhetorical construction of religious identity affects the influence of religious group norms on political attitudes.

Research on the intersection of religion and politics consistently finds a strong relationship between religiosity and conservative political attitudes (Malka, Lelkes, Srivastava, Cohen & Miller, 2012; Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt & Green, 2006; Layman & Green, 2005; Olson & Green, 2006). While there is general agreement about the existence of this relationship, particularly in the United States, there is considerable debate about why it exists. One side of this debate contends that the connection is organic, that the same types of ideologies and predispositions that incline people towards religion also underpin the politically conservative worldview (e.g. Alford, Funk & Hibbing, 2005; Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009; Jost, Nosek & Gosling, 2008). Others argue that the connection is driven by a social context in which religious leaders often espouse conservative political views, and conservative political elites (i.e. those in positions of authority who have the means to influence the opinions of others) appeal to religious values in advancing their political agenda (Malka et al, 2012; Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt & Poloma, 1997; Layman & Green, 2005).

While the weight of evidence suggests that the connection between religiosity and conservative politics is driven at least in part by the social context, the process by which elite discourse (i.e. the rhetoric of religious and political leaders) might influence attitudes has received relatively little attention. We adopt a social identity approach to religion in conceptualising its connection with political conservatism. Drawing on Reicher and colleagues’ work on the rhetorical construction of identity (Reicher, 2004; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002;
Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010), we investigate whether defining religious identity in terms of issues and values commonly associated with either the conservative or progressive side of politics affects how religious variables influence political attitudes.

Religiosity and political conservatism: is it nature or nurture?

Many theorists contend that there is a natural and organic connection between religiosity and conservative politics. Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009), for example, argue that political conservatives and liberals possess different foundations for moral judgements, and that those which motivate conservatives, such as concerns over purity and sanctity, are naturally relevant to religion. Others suggest that a desire to minimize uncertainty and threat may underpin both religiosity and conservatism (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Kay, Gaucher, Callan, Napier, & Laurin, 2008), or that resistance to both change and equality, which is integral to the conservative mind-set, also drives religious inclinations (Jost, 2007; Jost et al, 2008). This view feeds into the Culture war thesis (Hunter, 1991) which depicts the political system, particularly in the US, as riven by a deep cultural divide between religious conservatives and secular progressives; one that is fundamental and unbridgeable. Other research, however, indicates that antagonistic relations between religious and non-religious groups are not inevitable and that religious and irreligious identification can even attenuate hostility between these groups (Ysseldyk, Haslam, Matheson & Anisman, 2012).

There is, however, considerable evidence to indicate that the connection between religion and conservatism owes more to contextual factors. For instance, the connection does not apply consistently across religious groups. In the US context, Malka and colleagues (2012) found that Black Protestants and Jewish
Americans were more liberal than a non-religious control group across a number of domains, including (among Jews) social issues such as abortion and gay rights. This research also found that the connection between religiosity and conservatism was strong among those who were highly politically engaged but either weak or non-existent among those who were less engaged with politics. Furthermore, Malka and colleagues report results from the American National Election Studies (ANES) which show that the link between conservatism and religiosity has been far from uniform over time. For example, the share of self-identified conservatives among weekly church attenders rose sharply in the early 1990s and fluctuated considerably thereafter. While these findings do not preclude the possibility of an organic connection, they strongly suggest that the political context does indeed have an impact.

*Conceptualising religion*

Theory and research on religion within the social sciences has traditionally defined religiosity in terms of different orientations. While it was acknowledged that there were doctrinal differences across religions and religious denominations, the prevailing view was summed up by Gordon Allport (1950) who claimed that the religion to which people subscribed was less important for understanding their behaviour than the way they were religious. Indeed, Allport and Ross’ (1967) distinction between intrinsic (i.e. looking to religion for spiritual development, guidance and meaning) and extrinsic (i.e. using religion primarily for personal or social gain) religious orientations was the dominant conceptualization in the scientific study of religion for many decades (for reviews see Burris, 1999; Donahue, 1985; Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974; see Kirkpatrick and Hood, 1990 for a critique). The orientation approach was superseded by more ideologically-based
approaches involving measures such as Christian orthodoxy (Fullerton & Hunsberger, 1982), Fundamentalism (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Hood & Morris, 1985; Fulton, Gorsuch & Maynard, 1999; McFarland, 1989) and then Right-wing Authoritarianism (e.g. Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 1992; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001; Laythe, Finkel, Bringle & Kirkpatrick, 2002; Hall, Matz & Wood, 2010). The move to explore ideological measures has been found to be somewhat problematic (see Mavor, Macleod, Boal & Louis, 2009; Mavor, Louis & Laythe, 2011 for a critique), but demonstrates the importance of broader political and ideological contexts rather than simply personal orientation.

As an alternative socially-contextual approach, theorists have begun to approach religion from a social identity perspective, based on the view that religious affiliation serves “a uniquely powerful function in shaping psychological and social processes” (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2010, p. 60). Indeed, several researchers had anticipated the value of a social identity approach to these issues (e.g. Schwartz & Such, 1989; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999).

The social identity approach (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) is based on the notion that we can define ourselves in terms of what makes us unique as individuals (personal identity), or in terms of our memberships in social groups (social identity). One of the key insights of this perspective is that social identity is not a sublimation or distortion of one’s true identity; that it is in fact just as valid an expression of selfhood as personal identity. The concept of social identity helps provide a bridge between the personal and the social, the individual and the group. In this sense it is particularly useful for conceptualizing the psychological and social impact of religiosity given that it not only involves a very fundamental personal
commitment but also subscription to a shared system of belief, and membership of a defined social group. The social identity approach has been used to analyse the relationship between religion and a range of phenomena including fundamentalism (Herriot, 2007), prejudice (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999), intergroup conflict (Cairns, Kenworthy, Campbell & Hewstone, 2006; Verkuyten, 2007), and mental health (Koteskey, Little & Matthews, 1991; Ysseldyk, Mattheson & Anisman, 2009). However, there has been little research from a social identity perspective on the relationship between religion and political attitudes, and less still on the way in which the framing effect of elite religious rhetoric might influence the attitudes of group members.

*Group-based social influence*

The traditional view in social psychology drew a sharp distinction between two forms of social influence. This distinction has many instantiations, but is probably best encapsulated in Deutsch and Gerrard’s (1955) dual process theory which distinguishes between informational influence and normative influence. Informational influence is thought to be driven by the desire to accurately understand the world, and involves reliance on other people’s views in situations where we are uncertain about the appropriate judgement or response. Informational influence, according to this view, leads to genuine private acceptance of the views of others since they are thought to be informative about reality. Normative influence, on the other hand, is conceived as mere public compliance with the views of others in an attempt to gain approval or avoid sanction. This dual process model of social influence (which has echoes in the persuasion literature) has been rejected by social identity theorists who argue that
seeking accurate information about reality and wanting to understand the views of similar others are interdependent elements in a single process.

In rejecting the dual process model, Turner (1985; 1991) proposed a single process theory of social influence known as referent informational influence. The theory is based on the notion that we regard people who are similar to ourselves as valid sources of information about reality. We both expect to agree with similar others and are motivated to do so. From this perspective, the views of a church leader or fellow members of a religious group is not a source of coercive pressure but in fact provides the opportunity for validation of our own perceptions and beliefs. That is, the agreement of others lends a sense of objectivity to our subjective judgements. As Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010) put it:

“We can only establish the validity of our collective beliefs in collaboration with others who we categorise as similar to ourselves. Hence, fellow group members serve as essential reference points for our own perception. Our reliance on them is not in conflict with our concern for reality – it is through them that individual views are coordinated and transformed into shared values, beliefs and behaviours that have an objective quality” (p. 53).

Essentially, this view suggests that in seeking to understand and form opinions about the world, it is only natural for us to be guided by those with whom we share relevant characteristics. On matters of religion, for example, we might look to our church leaders or members of our own congregation; on matters of international relations we might look to national leaders or our fellow countrymen and women. To the extent that a particular attitude is perceived to reflect the consensual position (i.e. the norm) of a subjectively relevant reference group, then it is likely to influence our own opinion.
There is extensive empirical support for this social identity account of social influence. People’s attitudes and behaviour are systematically influenced by the norms of groups to which they belong, and particularly so for those who are highly identified with the group (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 1996; Terry, Hogg & White, 1999; Smith & Terry, 2003; Louis, Davies, Smith & Terry, 2007; Smith, Terry & Hogg, 2007; White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade & McKimmie, 2009).

However, even those who strongly identify with a group will not be bound by the group’s norms on every conceivable issue. Smith and colleagues found that the effect of ingroup norms on attitudes and behavioural intentions was moderated by the perceived relevance of the issue to the group (Smith, Terry, Crosier & Duck, 2005). They concluded that, “individuals do not follow group norms automatically, but take into account the extent to which the issue and the norm are both relevant and central to group membership” (p. 168). This accords with evidence from ingroup persuasion studies which have found that ingroup messages lead to more systematic processing only when the issue is seen as relevant to the group (Mackie, Worth & Asuncion, 1990; Wyer, 2010).

*Render unto Caesar*

The social identity approach to religion and social influence suggests that people who identify with a religious group will be motivated to agree with what they believe to be the normative views of the group. But this influence will be limited to those issues they perceive to be relevant to their religious identity – issues that implicate the types of values that are central to what it means to be a member of the group. So, to the extent that they believe group norms are towards the conservative end of the spectrum on political issues, individual members will be more likely to hold conservative attitudes themselves. Indeed, to the extent that
elite religious discourse, be it from the pulpit or in the media, leads people to perceive religious norms to be conservative, it would in turn drive the connection between religiosity and political conservatism. However, the import of this elite discourse in not simply that it informs individual members of what their leaders and their religious group peers think about this or that issue, it also conveys a deeper message about what the group cares about, what defines it; which issues are relevant to it, and which are not.

While a thorough analysis of elite religious rhetoric is beyond the scope of the current paper, it is clear that the matter of which issues are and are not relevant to one’s religious faith are not merely theological or philosophical questions; they are often, in fact, the very stuff of politics. With the rise of the Christian Right in the US in recent decades the relevance of religion to politics and public policy came to be focused on a narrow set of so-called ‘cultural policy’ issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and stem-cell research (Dionne, 2008). On these issues the norms of most mainstream religious groups are well known and are in line with the socially conservative stance of the contemporary Republican Party. The prominence of these issues has been an effective tool in mobilizing large numbers of religious voters in favour of Republican candidates, even among those who might not benefit from or endorse the Republicans’ economic agenda (Frank, 2004). The prominence of these cultural issues in elite religious discourse is reflected in research which shows that the relationship between religiosity and conservative policy preferences is far greater for cultural issues than for other policy domains (Malka et al, 2012; Davis & Robinson, 1996; Guth et al, 2006; Jelen, 2009, Layman & Greene 2005). This highlights a dichotomy between so-called ‘cultural’ issues and what we might call ‘civic’ issues; between issues that
are clearly relevant to religious faith and those for which the relevance is not so obvious, or is a matter of dispute. This dichotomy is epitomized by the quote attributed to Jesus in the gospel according to Matthew, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21, KJV).

This, however, reflects only one perspective on the relationship between religion and politics. Many have argued that religious teachings have a great deal to say about a wide range of issues and should not be restricted to questions of sexual and reproductive practices. There are in fact signs of a progressive backlash against the narrow focus of the Religious Right, with figures such as Rev. Jim Wallis (2005; 2008) and even Pope Francis (2013) attempting to alter the terms on which religious people engage with politics. By talking about civic issues, such as war, poverty and climate change, in religious terms, the likes of Wallis and Pope Francis have highlighted the religious import of issues traditionally emphasised by the political Left. Indeed, some have expressed the view that the era of the Religious Right is over (Dionne, 2008), and a new era of religious progressivism is upon us. Donald Trump’s victory over more conventionally religiously candidates in the Republican primaries and the Presidential election in 2016 suggests that although progressivism may not be in the ascendency, the relationship between religion and politics, at least in the US, is being reshaped (Jones, 2016). In this context, while many church leaders and members may hold progressive opinions on a range of issues, the success of this progressive movement depends on promulgating a version of religious identity with these types of concerns and issues at its heart.
The strategic construction of identity

The struggle to define group identity is often integral to politics. According to Reicher (2004), those who seek to shape public opinion and mobilise groups of people to a common cause need to be adept at manipulating people’s sense of selfhood:

“Our identities are no longer impressed upon us from an external reality. Identities may better be seen as projects, and those with different projects will propose different versions of their own identities and that of others… Those who seek to influence their peers and who aspire to direct the masses need to become entrepreneurs of identity before they can be leaders of people” (p. 53).

In a series of articles, Reicher and colleagues have analysed the strategic use of identity arguments in the rhetoric of political leaders and other elites. In one example, Reicher and Hopkins (1996a) analysed a speech by a British anti-abortion campaigner to a group of medical staff and students. Drawing upon the normative content of the medical profession as ‘caring’, the speaker argued that abortion was a violation of medical norms; that performing abortions was anathema to what it meant to be a medical professional. While this example involves arguments about the nature of group norms rather than the relevance of the issue to the group, it illustrates how arguments over identity definition are often integral to political debates. However, as Reicher and Hopkins (1996a) themselves note, it is one thing to demonstrate that arguments over group definition play a significant role in political rhetoric, it is quite another to demonstrate their effect.
Overview of the present research

The current research starts from the premise that elite rhetoric can have an impact on not only individuals’ understanding of the norms of the religious groups with which they identify, but also on the types of values that define the group and the issues that are relevant to it. While previous research has consistently found a strong connection between religiosity and political conservatism, particularly on cultural issues such as abortion and gay marriage, we explore how the way religious identity is defined can influence the connection between religious identification, religious norms and attitudes towards various political issues.

Based on findings (e.g. Malka et al, 2012) indicating that the connection between religiosity and conservative attitudes is largely limited to cultural issues, as well as the notion that the dominant rhetoric about the connection largely relates to cultural issues, we would expect that higher levels of Christian identification will be associated with more conservative attitudes on these issues, but not civic issues. While most previous studies have been conducted in the US context, we expect similar findings among both Australian (Study 1) and UK (Study 2) sample, given the degree of cultural similarity across the three contexts. Furthermore, drawing on the social identity approach to religious identification and social influence, we predict that highlighting the relevance of either cultural or civic issues to religious identity (Study 1), or defining religious identity in terms of either family values or social justice (Study 2) will affect the extent to which religious group norms predict participants’ attitudes towards cultural and civic issues. More specifically, we expect that highlighting the relevance of cultural issues or family values to one’s religion will strengthen the relationship
between religious norms and attitudes towards cultural issues. On the other hand, we expect that highlighting the relevance of civic issues or social justice to religious identity will strengthen the relationship between group norms and attitudes towards civic issues. In both cases, we expect these effects to be particularly evident at higher levels of religious group identification.

**Study 1**

*Participants and Design*

Participants were 98 self-identified Christians who were recruited for an online survey. Posters promoting the survey were displayed around the campus of the Australian National University, and were disseminated via Facebook. First-year psychology students were offered course credit for their participation in the study. Christian participants were identified on the basis of a range of demographic questions and were not aware of the centrality of this identity to the study. The sample consisted of 75 females and 23 males, with a mean age of 28.78 years (SD = 13.80). The design included four between-subjects conditions based on whether participants were exposed to a message suggesting that they may consider their religious faith to be relevant to particular types of issues: cultural issues, civic issues, both cultural and civic issues, or a no-issue control.

*Procedure*

Participants were supplied with the web address for the survey web page, which directed them randomly to one of four versions of an online survey hosted on an Australian National University web page. The four versions were identical in all respects except for the title and introductory paragraph that contained the
The manipulation was intended to frame the relationship between religion and political issues. In the control condition, the section was titled “What influences your attitudes?”. In the cultural issues condition it was titled “How does religion influence your attitudes about issues like abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage?”, in the civic issues condition it was titled “How does religion influence your attitudes about issues like welfare, asylum seekers and climate change?”, and in the cultural and civic issues condition it was titled “How does religion influence your attitudes?”. This framing was also reflected in the introductory paragraph participants read before completing the remaining survey items:

In the remainder of the survey, we are interested in learning about your attitudes toward a range of social and political issues, as well as the factors that influence your attitudes. [All conditions]

For those who are religious, you may find that your attitudes towards some issues are heavily influenced by your religious faith, while for others your faith might be completely irrelevant. [All conditions except Control]

For example, many Christians consider their religious faith to be particularly relevant when it comes to issues involving abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage / asylum seekers, welfare recipients, and the environment. [Note, in the cultural and civic condition, all of these issues were listed]

After reading the introductory message, participants then completed items measuring their attitudes towards a range of social and political issues, their level
of identification with Christians and their perceptions of Christian norms regarding various social and political issues. Participants then completed demographic items about their sex and age. Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, with a *Neutral* mid-point.

**Measures**

*Political attitudes* were measured via 24 items. Four items were devised to assess attitudes towards each of six political issues covering both cultural issues – abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage – and civic issues – welfare, asylum seekers and climate change (all items are included in Appendix A). Scale scores were calculated as the mean of the four item scores (allowing for reverse-scored items), with higher scores reflecting more politically conservative attitudes.

*Christian identification* was assessed via five items derived from Leach et al (2008). Items assessed solidarity with other members of the group, satisfaction with being a member of the group, the centrality of membership to one’s self-concept, degree of self-stereotyping with the group, and perceived in-group homogeneity. Scale scores were computed as the mean of the five items with higher scores indicating greater identification with Christians (α = .89).

Six items were devised to assess perceived *Christian norms* for the six political issues (one item for each issue – see Appendix A). Items asked participants whether they thought most Christians would support or oppose particular policy positions (e.g. “Greater restrictions placed on abortions”, and “A more compassionate approach to accepting asylum seekers”), with higher scores indicating greater perceived support for conservative positions.
Results

*Data analysis overview*

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for each of the scales in the study, along with the alpha reliability coefficients for each. Reliabilities were satisfactory for most scales with the exception of that measuring attitudes towards abortion, which was somewhat lower than others ($\alpha = .55$). After item analysis we removed the item with the poorest connection to the scale (“There would be a lot fewer neglected children if abortions were more readily available”). This improved the reliability considerably ($\alpha = .75$).

The mean level of Christian identification was significantly above the scale mid-point, though it was still within the moderate range of identification. The mean level of attitudes towards cultural issues was significantly below the scale mid-point, that is, towards the more progressive end of the scale. Attitudes towards climate change were also towards the progressive end of the scale, while attitudes towards welfare were marginally towards the conservative end of the scale. Attitudes towards asylum seekers were not significantly different to the scale mid-point. As expected, participants perceived Christian norms towards cultural issues to be relatively conservative, and norms towards civic issues were perceived to be relatively progressive. ANOVAs indicated that there were no significant differences in Christian identification, attitudes towards the individual issues, or perceived norms for those issues across frame conditions.
### Table 1. Descriptive data for measures (means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations and reliabilities) – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean (M)</th>
<th>SD (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian identification</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion (3-item)</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex marriage</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.50**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asylum seekers</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Abortion norm</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.22**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthanasia norm</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>- .01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex marriage norm</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Welfare norm</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change norm</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum seekers norm</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.03</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The alpha reliabilities for scale scores are in the diagonal. Norms were each measured by a single item.

*p < .05; **p < .01.
Table 2 displays the results of a moderated multiple regression analysis of the effects of Christian identification, perceived Christian norms and frame condition along with their respective interactions on attitudes to each of the six issues under consideration. The comparisons between frame conditions were effect coded via three variables: 1 (cultural frame) vs. –1 (control); 1 (civic frame) vs. –1 (control); and 1 (cultural and civic frame) vs. –1 (control). In all cases centred scores were used to calculate the interaction terms to ensure that multicolinearity between the main effects and interaction terms did not distort the results (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003).

As expected, there was a significant positive relationship between Christian identification and attitudes towards each of the cultural issues, with higher levels of Christian identification associated with more conservative attitudes on the issues of abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. Also as anticipated, the relationship between Christian identification and attitudes did not extend to civic issues. Indeed, there was no relationship between Christian identification and attitudes to welfare, climate change or asylum seekers.

There were several moderation effects for perceived Christian norms with some variations across cultural and civic issues. Regarding attitudes towards abortion, for example, we found the standard group-based social influence pattern with a positive relationship between Christian norms and attitudes only at higher levels of identification. We found a similar, though weaker, pattern for attitudes towards asylum seekers. For attitudes towards euthanasia, however, there was a negative relationship with Christian norms at low levels of Christian identification. There was no relationship between norms and attitudes towards
either same-sex marriage or welfare regardless of the level of Christian identification. There was a marginally positive relationship between norms and attitudes towards climate change, although this was not moderated by level of Christian identification. We did, however, find that the extent to which Christian norms predicted attitudes towards climate change was moderated by frame condition, as will be discussed below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Euthanasia</th>
<th>Same-Sex Marriage</th>
<th>Welfare</th>
<th>Climate Change</th>
<th>Asylum Seekers</th>
<th>Christian Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian norms</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms x ID</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral frame</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>-1.16</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic frame</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral &amp; Civic frame</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral frame x Norms</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic frame x Norms</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral &amp; Civic frame x Norms</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The impact of frame condition

The results indicate that the frame manipulations had little impact on the relationship between either Christian identification or perceived Christian norms and attitudes towards political issues. There was, however, one exception, with the combined Moral & Civic frame influencing the relationship between perceived Christian norms and attitudes towards climate change. As shown in Figure 1, in the Control condition, there was no relationship between perceived Christian norms regarding climate change on participants’ attitudes towards the issue \( (B = .05, SE = .13, p = .683, \beta = .08) \). Among those exposed to the Moral & Civic frame, however, there was a marginally significant relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards climate change \( (B = .60, SE = .25, p = .024, \beta = .52) \), such that those who perceived Christians to be more concerned about the issue were more likely to be concerned themselves.

As shown in Table 1, the interaction of Civic frame and perceived Christian norms on attitudes towards climate change was also significant, \( (B = .45, SE = .19, p = .02, \beta = .43) \). In spite of this, however, the relationship between perceived Christian norms and attitudes towards climate change was not significant in the Civic frame condition \( (B = .35, SE = .24, p = .16, \beta = .37) \).

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1 After controlling for the effect of Christian identification and norms on attitudes towards welfare, there was a significant positive main effect of the Civic frame. Participants in the Civic frame condition reported more conservative attitudes towards welfare than those in the Control condition.

2 Although the effect of the Moral & Civic frame x Norm interaction was stronger \( (B = .71) \) than the Civic frame x Norm interaction \( (B = .45) \) the former failed to reach conventional significance because of a high standard error (.38, twice that of the error for the Civic x Norm effects).
Study 1 Discussion

The results of Study 1 are consistent with the findings of previous studies that there is a connection between religiosity and political attitudes. As predicted, the results showed that those who reported higher levels of Christian identification were more likely to hold conservative attitudes towards cultural issues such as abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage. The findings also support the prediction that this connection would not extend to civic issues such as welfare, asylum seekers, and climate change. The importance of such context was also supported by the fact that there was a positive relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards climate change only among those participants who were exposed to a message highlighting the relevance of Christianity to issues.

Figure 1. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards Climate change.

3 The level of identification with one’s religious group is a different measure of religiosity to those used in other research, such as the frequency of religious attendance (e.g. Malka et al., 2012), however results indicate that identification is strongly correlated with religious attendance ($r = .49$, $p < .001$).
including climate change. However, this was the only instance where the frame manipulation appeared to have an impact. The absence of any impact of messages highlighting the relevance of cultural issues to the Christian faith may have been because participants are regularly exposed to similar messages outside the lab. However, the fact that the frame manipulations had no effect on the relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards welfare or asylum seekers suggests that a more elaborate type of message may be required to readily alter the way people understand the relationship between their faith and political issues.

**Study 2**

In Study 2 we examine the impact of messages designed to influence the types of core values that people associate with their faith and their religious groups. We predict that reference to underlying values, rather than to explicit issues, may have a more pronounced effect on the way participants understand their religious identity, and its relevance to different types of political issues. Specifically, we predict that defining Christian identity in terms of family values will increase the relationship between religious norms and attitudes towards cultural issues. Similarly, we expect that defining Christian identity in terms of social justice and sustainability will increase the relationship between religious norms and attitudes towards civic issues, particularly among high identifiers.

**Participants and Design**

Participants were 97 self-identified Christians who were recruited for an online survey. Participants received credits for completing the survey, which could be exchanged for consumer products. Participants were recruited via an online panel of United Kingdom residents. As with Study 1, Christian participants
were identified on the basis of a range of demographic questions and were not aware of the centrality of this identity to the study. The sample consisted of 53 females and 44 males, with a mean age of 49.32 years (SD = 13.16). The design included three between-subjects conditions based on whether participants were exposed to a message suggesting the types of values that many Christians see as defining their religious faith: family values, social justice and sustainability, or a control condition.

**Procedure**

Participants were randomly allocated to complete one of three versions of the questionnaire. The three versions were identical in all respects except for the title and introductory paragraph that contained the experimental manipulation (see below). The manipulations were intended to influence the types of values that define the Christian identity, particularly as it relates to social and political issues. In the control condition, the section was titled “What influences your attitudes?”, in the remaining two conditions it was titled “How does religion influence your attitudes”. This framing was also reflected in the introductory paragraph participants read before completing the remaining survey items:

In the remainder of the survey, we are interested in learning about your attitudes toward a range of social and political issues, as well as the factors that influence your attitudes. **[Control condition]**

In the remainder of the survey, we are interested in learning about your attitudes towards a range of issues. We are also interested in whether, and to what extent, religious beliefs influence your attitudes. For those who identify with a religious group, you may find that your attitudes towards some issues are heavily influenced by your religious faith,
while for others issues your faith might be completely irrelevant. [both

**Family values and Social justice conditions].**

For example, many in the Christian community would say that a commitment to family values is partly inspired by their religious faith, and in particular, by the moral principles outlined in the Bible. For many, their faith involves recognizing the family as the fundamental unit of society and a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. [Family values condition only].

For example, many in the Christian community would say that a desire to protect the vulnerable and assist the disadvantaged is partly inspired by their faith, and in particular, by biblical stories like that of the Good Samaritan. For many, their faith involves a commitment to a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable way of living. [Social justice condition only].

After reading the introductory message, participants then completed items measuring their attitudes towards a range of social and political issues, their level of identification with Christians and their perceptions of Christian norms regarding various social and political issues. Participants then completed demographic items about their sex and age. Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, with a *Neutral* mid-point.

**Measures**

The identification, norms and outcome attitude measures used in Study 2 were the same as used in Study 1, but for two items that were adapted for the different sample by replacing “Australia” with “Britain”.

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Results and discussion

Data analysis overview

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for each of the scales in the study, along with the alpha reliability coefficients for each. Reliabilities for all scales were satisfactory. As the reliability of the 4-item abortion scale was within the satisfactory range, the full scale was used for all subsequent analyses.

The level of Christian identification was significantly above the scale mid-point, though it was still within the moderate level of identification. Participants’ attitudes towards abortion, euthanasia and asylum seekers and same-sex marriage were significantly below the scale mid-point, that is, towards the more progressive end of the scale (albeit only marginally so in the case of same-sex marriage). Attitudes towards climate change and welfare were towards the more conservative end of the scale. There were some significant differences in participants’ attitudes across the two studies. Participants in Study 2 tended to hold more conservative attitudes on same-sex marriage and climate change, but more progressive attitudes on asylum seekers. This may reflect differences in the demographic profile of the two samples, as well as slightly different political contexts of the United Kingdom compared with Australia. Indeed, to the extent that the specific political context within a nation, society or group influences the social meaning of an issue, we would expect any differences to be reflected in group norms.

As with study 1, participants tended to perceive Christian norms to be towards the conservative end on cultural issues, but more progressive on civic issues. ANOVAs indicated that there were no significant differences in Christian
identification, attitudes towards the individual issues, or perceived norms for the individuals across frame conditions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Christian identification</td>
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<td>1.35</td>
<td>(.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Abortion</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.35** (.68)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Euthanasia</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.35** .37** (.80)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Same-sex marriage</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.32** .32** .32** (.87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Welfare</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.01 - .05 -.20 .06 (.73)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Climate change</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.03 -.01 .04 .18 .25* (.62)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Asylum seekers</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-.09 -.15 -.29** .20 .39** (.72)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Abortion norm</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.05 .35** -.01 -.07 -.04 -.09 (.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Euthanasia norm</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.15 .16 -.02 .32** .07 .03 .26* (.38**)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Same-sex marriage norm</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.15 .16 -.02 .32** .07 .03 .26* (.38**)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Welfare norm</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>-.27** -.07 -.05 .09 .41** .26* .28** -.21* (.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Climate change norm</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.05 -.05 -.19 .02 -.15 .04 (.33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Asylum seekers norm</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>-.05 -.27** -.32** -.22** (-.22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The alpha reliabilities for scale scores are in the diagonal. Norms were each measured by a single item.

* p < .05; ** p < .01.
The impact of Christian identification and norms

Table 4 displays the results of a moderated multiple regression analysis of the effects of Christian identification, perceived Christian norms and the frame condition along with their respective interactions on attitudes to each of the six issues under consideration. The comparisons between frame conditions were effect coded via two variables: 1 (family values frame) vs. –1 (control); and 1 (social justice frame) vs. –1 (control). In all cases centred scores were used to calculate the interaction terms to ensure that multicolinearity between the main effects and interaction terms did not distort the results (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003).

In line with the results from Study 1, there was a significant positive relationship between religious norms and attitudes towards Christian identification and attitudes towards each of the cultural issues with higher levels of Christian identification associated with more conservative attitudes towards abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. Also consistent with Study 1, the relationship between Christian identification and attitudes did not extend to civic issues, with no relationship between Christian identification and attitudes to welfare, climate change or asylum seekers.

Unlike Study 1, however, the relationship between Christian norms and attitudes was fairly consistent across the range of issues. As shown in Table 4, there was a strong main effect of perceived norms for all issues except euthanasia. Furthermore, in most cases this effect was moderated by level of Christian identification. Indeed, the relationship between norms and attitudes was stronger at high levels of identification for attitudes towards abortion, same-sex marriage, climate change and asylum seekers. In many cases, however, these relationships
were further moderated by frame condition. While there was no main effect of Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia, nor a two-way interaction with Christian identification, the relationship between these factors and attitudes towards euthanasia was moderated by frame condition.
Table 4. B weights from hierarchical regression models predicting attitudes for each of the six issues - Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Christian Identification</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Family Values Frame</th>
<th>Social Justice Frame</th>
<th>Christian Norms x ID</th>
<th>Social Justice Frame x Norm x ID</th>
<th>Social Justice Frame x Norm</th>
<th>Christian Norms x Norm x ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change x Family Values Frame</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change x Social Justice Frame</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change x Christian Norms</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistics reported for the step when variables are first entered into the model. *p < .05; **p < .01, ***p < .001; †p < .08
Impact of the family values frame

The results indicate that the family values frame had an impact on how the interaction of identification and norms predicted attitudes on a number of issues. As shown in Figure 2, there was a significant relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards abortion among high identifiers in the control condition ($B = .38, SE = .10, p = .004, \beta = .58$), but this relationship was even stronger among those exposed to the family values frame ($B = .90, SE = .16, p < .001, \beta = .96$).

![High identifiers](image)

*Figure 2. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards abortion – High identifiers.*
Figure 3. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards abortion – Low identifiers.

There was also a significant relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards abortion among low identifiers in the Control condition \( (B = .33, SE = .13, p = .018, \beta = .51) \), but this was not evident among those exposed to the family values frame \( (B = .04, SE = .14, p = .72, \beta = .05) \), (Figure 3). The family values frame also appeared to produce a significant relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards euthanasia among high identifiers \( (B = .40, SE = .15, p = .011, \beta = .61) \), one that was not evident among high identifiers in the Control condition \( (B = -.04, SE = .13, p = .761, \beta = -.07) \), (Figure 4). In this case, however, exposure to the family values frame had no impact on the relationship between Christian norms and the attitudes of low identifiers (Figure 5).

These results are consistent with the notion that the family values frame worked to establish or enhance the perceived relevance of cultural issues like abortion and euthanasia to the Christian identity. As predicted, this either created or accentuated the relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards these issues among high identifiers. A reciprocal process was also apparent.
among low identifiers. By emphasising the relevance of Christian identity to the issue of abortion, it appears that the family values frame undermined the influence of Christian norms on the attitudes of low identifiers.

**Figure 4.** Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia – High identifiers.

**Figure 5.** Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia – Low identifiers.
Unexpectedly, the family values frame also saw high identifiers report attitudes towards welfare that were in line with Christian norms ($B = .68, SE = .32, p = .044, \beta = .65$), a relationship that was not evident among high identifiers in the control condition ($B = .15, SE = .16, p = .370, \beta = .18$). The family values frame also appeared to eliminate the relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards welfare among low identifiers ($B = .36, SE = .24, p = .137, \beta = .35$), that was apparent in the control condition ($B = .87, SE = .27, p = .003, \beta = 1.02$), (Figures 6 and 7). We categorised the welfare issue among the civic group of issues and that categorisation is largely supported by the general patterns of correlations in both studies. However, welfare can be construed as having a direct impact on the family life of some in a more tangible way than climate change or immigration, and therefore the family values frame may have changed the meaning participants attached to the issue. That is, the family values frame seemed to influence not only the way participants understood the relevance of the issue to their faith, but also the way they understood the issue itself.
**Figure 6.** Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards welfare – High identifiers.

**Figure 7.** Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards welfare – Low identifiers.
Impact of the Social justice frame

The social justice frame also appeared to have an impact on the relationship between perceived Christian norms and attitudes towards political issues. As shown in Figure 8, there was a significant relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards abortion in the Control condition ($B = .35, SE = .09, p = .001, \beta = .55$), but not among those exposed to the Social justice frame ($B = .05, SE = .10, p = .607, \beta = .09$). Effectively, it seems that by defining the Christian identity beyond the traditional focus on sexual and reproductive morality, the social justice frame eliminated the relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards abortion. Unlike other effects, this was not moderated by the level of Christian identification.

\footnote{In addition to the effects reported, the results also show a significant interaction of Christian identification, perceived norms and the social justice frame for attitudes towards Euthanasia. However, the effect of norms was not significant among high or low identifiers in either the Control condition or the Social justice condition.}
Figure 8. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards abortion.

Exposure to the social justice frame also influenced attitudes towards climate change. In the control condition, there was a significant relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards climate change among both low identifiers ($B = .39, SE = .15, p = .013, \beta = .65$) and high identifiers ($B = .47, SE = .08, p < .001, \beta = .79$), such that those who perceived Christian norms to favour addressing climate change were themselves more likely to report such attitudes. However, this relationship was not apparent among low identifiers in the social justice frame condition ($B = -.19, SE = .19, p = .332, \beta = -.29$) (Figure 9). The fact that the social justice frame eliminated the relationship between norms and attitudes among low identifiers, but not high identifiers is consistent with the notion that the Social justice frame established the relevance of climate change to the Christian identity. Rather than endorse Christian norms regarding climate
change in this situation, it seems that low identifiers instead tended to disregard them.

\[\text{Figure 9. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards climate change – Low identifiers.}\]

**General discussion**

The current studies were designed to investigate the connection between religion and political attitudes, and whether the way religious identity is framed can influence the connection between religious identification, religious norms and attitudes towards various political issues. More specifically, we wanted to examine whether highlighting the relevance of either cultural or civic issues to religious identity would increase the extent to which religious group norms influence attitudes towards those types of issues, particularly among those who were highly identified with the religious group. Across two studies, self-identified Christian participants were randomly assigned to conditions in which the
relevance of cultural and/or civic issues to their Christian identity was highlighted (Study 1) or where their Christian identity was defined in terms of family values or a commitment to social justice (Study 2). Both studies also included a control condition in order to gauge the underlying meaning participants attach to the group and the issues; meanings presumably informed by frames encountered in public discourse.

Many of the findings of the two studies offer considerable support for the main predictions. Across both studies, we found that Christian identification was strongly associated with conservative attitudes towards cultural issues, but not civic issues. We also found, as predicted, that highlighting the relevance of civic issues to Christian identity saw Christian norms predicting attitudes towards climate change (Study 1), while defining Christian identity in terms of family values was associated with an increased influence of Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia and abortion (Study 2). These findings support the notion that elite religious rhetoric that emphasises conservative positions on cultural issues is at least partly responsible for the common finding of a connection between religiosity and political conservatism. However, the results also suggest that such rhetoric works to define what issues are relevant to the religious identity such that group members should be guided by the religious group norms. By implication, this rhetoric defines other issues as not relevant to the group, such that group members need not feel compelled to look to or be bound by group norms. As such, evidence that highlighting the relevance of civic issues led to normative influence on attitudes towards climate change indicates that, given a supportive context, the relevance of religion can extend beyond the realm of cultural issues. While these findings were in line with the predictions, there were a number of
other findings that, while not explicitly predicted, are nonetheless explicable in terms of the same group-based social influence processes.

In Study 2, for example, we found normative influence on attitudes towards abortion among participants in the control condition. That is, the more conservative participants perceived Christians norms towards abortion, the more conservative their own attitudes. However, the significant relationship between group norms and attitudes was not apparent among those exposed to the message highlighting the relevance of social justice values to their Christian identity. This suggests that defining the identity on the basis of social justice values did not so much expand participants’ understanding of the identity and the issues relevant to it, but shifted it away from an understanding that was relevant to abortion. While this is explicable in terms of social identity processes, it was not a specific effect we had predicted prior to the study.

Based on previous research, we confined our predictions about normative influence and the impact of messages about the religious identity to those who were highly identified with the group. However, in a number of cases we found that these framing messages appeared to undermine normative influence among low identifiers. In Study 2, exposure to the family values frame saw normative influence eliminated on attitudes towards abortion among low identifiers, while the social justice frame negated normative influence on attitudes towards climate change. That is, while there was a degree of normative influence among low identifiers in the control condition, they responded to messages highlighting the relevance of particular issues to religious identity by effectively disregarding the group norm on that issue. Again, though these effects were not explicitly included among our hypotheses, they are in line with the theory of group-based social
influence. Although we would largely expect normative influence to be most
evident among high identifiers, it is certainly plausible that there would be
contrasting effects among low identifiers.

A further notable result concerns attitudes towards welfare. Based on our
own conceptions of welfare as a matter of social justice, we expected that defining
the Christian identity in terms of these values would increase the relationship
between group norms and attitudes among high identifiers. However, it was the
family values message that appeared to have this effect, along with eliminating
the normative influence among low identifiers, suggesting that framing Christian
identity in terms of family values led participants to regard the issue of welfare as
relevant to their Christian identity. This points to the plurality not only in how
group identity can be understood, but also in how the issues themselves can be
understood (Cohen, 2003; Malka & Lelkes, 2010). Perhaps the family values
frame, and particularly the reference to the nurturing of children, led participants
to consider welfare in light of their own family circumstances, or in terms of the
caring, prosocial norms associated with the Christian identity (see Malka, Soto,
Cohen & Miller, 2011).

The pattern of results across the two studies suggests that messages about
the underlying values associated with the Christian identity were more effective
in establishing an alignment between recipients’ understanding of the content of
the identity and the social meaning of the issue than the more simple and direct
message about the types of issues relevant to the identity. However, it should also
be noted that there was considerable variability in the effects of the family values
and social justice frames across various issues. As outlined above, they had
significant effects in some cases, but little effect in others. While this pattern of
results does not provide consistent support for the theoretical approach examined in these studies, a certain amount of variation in the effect of frames is to be expected given the dynamic nature of the meanings ascribed to issue and groups, particularly in the context of critical and engaged message recipients. To the extent that the predicted effects were evident in some but not all cases, this suggests that participants did not simply accept the implicit message of the frames (i.e. the issues that were relevant to the group Christians) in a mindless or heuristic fashion, but instead they actively interpreted the frames, accepting those they found convincing, and dismissing those they did not. This may reflect a degree of rigidity in participants’ understanding of the nature of some issues, or the group content, or perhaps simply the inadequacy of the frame in establishing an alignment between the two. It is possible that a more elaborate message that more closely replicates the type of frames encountered in public debate would prove more effective.

Theoretical implications

The present research contributes to our understanding of the connection between religion and political attitudes at several levels. By demonstrating the general association between religiosity and political conservatism in both Australia and the UK, and among both a student and a general sample, these results attest to the generalisability of this association beyond the US (where the bulk of the research has been conducted). While this may offer a degree of support to the argument that the connection between religiosity and conservative political attitudes is indeed organic (e.g. Graham, et al, 2009; Jost et al, 2008), the findings are also consistent with previous research (e.g. Malka et al, 2012; Guth et al, 2006; Jelen, 2009, Layman & Greene, 2005) in showing that the connection is
generally limited to cultural issues. Furthermore, the fact that the influence of religious group norms was to some extent dependent on the messages participants read about their religious identity adds weight to the notion that the connection between religion and conservatism is context dependent, and at least partly a product of elite discourse (Malka, et al, 2012).

By highlighting the relationship between religious group norms, in addition to (and in interaction with) religious identification, and political attitudes, these findings also add to the growing body of literature exploring religion from a social identity perspective (e.g. Herriot, 2007; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999; Cairns et al, 2006; Verkuyten, 2007; Koteskey, Little & Matthews, 1991; Ysseldyk, Mattheson & Anisman, 2009). Indeed, we believe this research is the first to experimentally investigate the classic pattern of social-identity based normative influence for religion identities and political attitudes. Moreover, the results add to previous findings (Smith, et al, 2005; Mackie, et al, 1990; Wyer, 2010) in demonstrating that group members, even those who are highly identified, will not be influenced by group norms on all issues; that the perceived relevance of the issue to the group identity is often an important moderating factor.

In demonstrating that messages about the nature of group identity can affect the extent to which group norms influence attitudes towards particular issues, these findings also contribute to the literature on the rhetorical construction of identity. We argue that this research is an effective experimental demonstration of the process of identity entrepreneurship that Reicher and colleagues have examined beyond the lab (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004). These results extend this work by showing that influencing the
range of issues deemed relevant to a group identity is a potential strategy available to entrepreneurs of identity.

These findings also have considerable practical import for those who seek to shape public opinion, showing the potential efficacy of messages that define group identity in a way that establishes the relevance of the group to particular issues. However, the results also sound a note of caution that the effect of such messages can be more subtle and complex than one might expect. While a message may, for example, have the intended effect of generating normative influence among some, it may also undermine the effect of group norms among others. Similarly, it is difficult to predict how such messages will be interpreted; the meaning derived by those who receive the message, whether about the nature of the group or of the issue, may be different to the meaning intended.

These findings will also be heartening to those who have sought to expand the public discussion of religion’s relevance to politics beyond the narrow focus on cultural issues. While these findings may not herald the imminent emergence of a powerful ‘Religious Left’, they do suggest that there is scope to construct a religious identity that encompasses concerns about a broader range of issues including poverty, inequality, war and climate change.

Limitations and opportunities for future research

It is important to note that while this research sought to investigate the connection between religion and political attitudes, the samples included only those who self-identified as Christians, and the frame manipulations referred explicitly to this identity group. While there is no reason to suspect that the social influence processes explored are limited to Christians, future research should seek to replicate and extend these findings with a broad range of religious groups.
Indeed, to the extent that both norms and elite discourse vary across different religious denominations, replicating these results across other religious groups would lend greater confidence to the conclusions.

Another limitation of the present research was the nature of the experimental manipulations. While the findings suggest that the simple messages employed were sufficient, in some instances, to influence participants’ understanding of group identity and the issues relevant to it, these messages do not replicate the type of rich and sustained messages delivered by political and other elites. Some of the factors that were not part of the current research design, but are likely to augment the impact of framing include repeated exposure to a message, features of the message source, and deliberation with others. As such, these results likely underestimate the potential of elite discourse to influence how groups are defined and understood.

The results discussed here are best understood as complementary to the more complex and nuanced analyses of elite rhetoric offered through discursive analyses of political speech. Future research could seek further convergence of these methods by having participants read or listen to more typical speeches or interviews, and over an extended period. Similarly, having participants discuss the meaning of group identity in small interactive groups could provide insights into the role that dynamic social reinforcement plays in shaping religious and political group identities (see Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2015; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009; Postmes, Haslam & Swaab, 2005; Postmes, Spears, Lee & Novak, 2005).
Conclusion

The connection between religion and political attitudes and behaviour has been a source of fascination to social scientists since the earliest studies of voting behaviour (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944). While this research replicates the common finding that religiosity is associated with political conservatism, it suggests that this is due as much to the social context as to a natural connection. Drawing on the social identity perspective, the present studies offer new insights into the processes through which people’s religious faith influences their political attitudes. They also suggest that though this influence has come to be largely manifested in conservative attitudes on cultural issues, this is likely a product of elite discourse and may be subject to change should the nature of elite discourse shift over time.
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards Climate change – Study 1.

Figure 2. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards abortion (High identifiers) – Study 2.

Figure 3. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards abortion (Low identifiers) – Study 2.

Figure 4. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia (High identifiers) – Study 2.

Figure 5. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia (Low identifiers) – Study 2.

Figure 6. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards welfare (High identifiers) – Study 2.

Figure 7. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards welfare (Low identifiers) – Study 2.

Figure 8. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards abortion – Study 2.

Figure 9. Interaction of frame condition and Christian norms on attitudes towards climate change (Low identifiers) – Study 2.
Appendix A

Items measuring political attitudes

Abortion
- Abortion is a personal moral choice for a women, not a decision society should make on her behalf. *
- Legalised abortion leads to a lower regard for the value of all human life.
- There would be a lot fewer neglected children if abortions were more readily available. *
- Abortion is never an option for a Christian person.

Euthanasia
- When palliative care fails to manage a terminally ill person’s pain, voluntary death should be an allowable option. *
- Even if death is positively preferable to life in the judgement of a terminal patient, no action should be taken to induce the patient’s death.
- If voluntary euthanasia became legal, it is just a short step to political or social euthanasia of the powerless in society.
- To me, anyone who assists a suffering and terminally ill person to die is nothing but a common murderer.

Same-sex marriage
- It would be wrong for same-sex couples to be allowed to adopt children.
- It is only fair that same-sex couples have all the same property and financial rights as heterosexual couples. *
- Homosexual marriages should be recognised as legal in Australia. *
- Granting equal status to same-sex relationships would be detrimental to society.

Welfare
- Limits should be placed on the amount of time people can claim unemployment benefits.
- A generous welfare system is a sign of a healthy society. *
- The welfare system often undermines self-reliance and creates a culture of dependence.
- Welfare is the best way to help people get back on their feet. *

Climate change
- It is the responsibility of the current generation to preserve the natural environment for those that follow. *
- We all need to be prepared to make sacrifices if we want to avoid environmental catastrophe. *
- We need to take whatever steps necessary to reduce carbon dioxide emissions even if it involves economic costs. *
- If we followed the advice of environmentalists, the economy would be ruined.

Asylum seekers
I don’t understand why [Australians/people] are so concerned about a few boat people. *
We should only accept refugees who come here through the proper channels.
As a peaceful, affluent country, we have an obligation to accept refugees fleeing persecution. *
The government should do more to prevent asylum seekers getting to [Australia/Britain].

* Indicates reverse-scored items.

**Items measuring Perceived Christian norms towards political issues**

Please indicate the extent you think most Christians would oppose or support the following positions:

- Greater restrictions placed on abortion *
- Legalised euthanasia in certain circumstances *
- Legalising same-sex marriage *
- More funding for welfare programs *
- Taking urgent action to address climate change *
- A more compassionate approach to accepting asylum seekers *

* Indicates reverse-scored items.
Chapter 6 – Context statement

Title: Framing the climate change debate: The impact of issue frames on the normative influences on attitudes towards climate change

Student contribution: Study design (in consultation with supervisor Mavor), implementation, data collection, data analysis, interpretation (in consultation with Mavor). Lead author on write-up.

Publication outlet: Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Publication status: Preparing manuscript for submission.

The studies outlined in Chapter 5 aimed to assess whether messages about the nature of group identity can influence the extent to which group norms predict attitudes towards different types of issues. More specifically, the research sought to examine whether highlighting the relevance of either cultural or civic issues to religious identity would increase the extent to which religious group norms influence attitudes towards those types of issues, particularly among those who were highly identified with their religious group. The results indicated that highlighting the relevance of these different types can indeed affect the extent to which group norms influence attitudes, particularly, though not always exclusively, among high identifiers. These types of messages were also shown to undermine normative influence among low identifiers in some cases.

These findings support the notion that messages about the nature of group identity can, in some cases, influence the extent to which recipients see an alignment between the content of the group identity – the types of interests and values that it embodies – and the social meaning of the issue – the interests and
values that are implicated. That is, by influencing how recipients understand the nature of the group, framing an identity according to a particular issue can lead them to recognise the issue as relevant to the group. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the perceived relevance of the issue to the group is an important factor in moderating normative influence.

The findings outlined in Chapter 5 follow on from previous qualitative research demonstrating the rhetorical construction of identity (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a; Reicher and Hopkins, 2001b; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010). However, rhetorical messages about an identity group designed to influence attitudes towards specific issues is only one side of a two-sided coin. The research outlined in Chapter 6 explores whether similar group based influence can be achieved through messages about the nature of a specific issue. Using a traditional issue framing paradigm, we examine whether different constructions of the issue of climate change can influence the group identities that are seen as relevant to the issue and thus the extent to which those group norms come to predict attitudes. The second of the two studies also examines whether political knowledge moderates the effect of frames in terms of group based processes, as it has been shown to do in traditional framing processes. Study 2 also investigates whether the effect of the issue frame on climate change attitudes is mediated by an increase in the perceived relevance of the issue to the group in question.

These results suggest that framing can influence the extent to which people view the issue of climate change through the prism of various group identities. Furthermore, this can be achieved with frames that do not explicitly mention the group, but merely align the social meaning of the issue with the
meaning associated with the group. The results provide experimental support for
the more qualitative work on the effects of political rhetoric on the identities
through which people understand political issues. They also contribute to our
understanding of how issues like climate change come to be invested with
symbolic meaning through their relevance to particular cultural or political
groups. Significantly, this research offers some guidance as to how such meanings
can be challenged and overcome.

The results also suggest that the effect of frames that operate through
group based influence can be greater among those with higher levels of political
knowledge. This contributes to our understanding of social influence processes,
and corroborates previous findings suggesting that such influence is often the
product of rational, thoughtful processes. Finally, the results contribute to the
research on social influence by demonstrating that group based social influence
can operate as a symmetrical process of attraction to, and repulsion from, referent
group norms, depending on the salience of the group, the level of identification,
and the meaning associated with the group.
Framing the climate change debate: The impact of issue frames on the normative influences on attitudes towards climate change

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Abstract

The way climate change is framed is often just as contested as the policy responses. The current research adopts a social identity approach in investigating whether the normative influences on attitudes towards climate change vary according to how the issue is framed. Across two studies, climate change was framed as a moral, economic or political issue, or in the absence of an issue frame. Framing climate change as an economic issue (Study 1) or a political issue (Study 2) saw a positive relationship between perceived class norms and attitudes at high levels of class identification, and a negative relationship between class norms and attitudes at low levels of class identification. Furthermore, mediation analysis (Study 2) indicated that the effect of the frame on attitudes towards climate change was partly mediated by the extent to which the issue was perceived as relevant to class identity. These results suggest that the way an issue is framed can influence the group identities through which people understand an issue, and the extent to which group norms influence attitudes. However, the effect of the frame and the group norms depends upon recipients’ relationship to the group evoked.

Keywords: Climate change, entrepreneurs of identity, normative influence, issue frames
Framing the climate change debate: The impact of issue frames on the normative influences on attitudes towards climate change

In the public debate over climate change, the way the issue is framed is often just as contested as the policy responses. Many proponents of action to address climate change have sought to highlight the moral dimension of the issue. In *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore (2006) argued that climate change is not just an environmental or political issue, but a moral one. Similarly, both US President Barack Obama (Eilperin, 2013) and Pope Francis (Roberts & Kirchgaessner, 2015) have emphasised the moral imperative to address climate change. In contrast, the general practice of those who oppose climate change action has been to frame climate change as an economic issue, emphasising the economic costs of any proposed action. These frames are undoubtedly designed to influence public opinion about climate change, but the exact process through which influence might occur is unclear. Drawing on the social identity perspective, we argue that these alternative characterisations of climate change influence the extent to which different group identities are seen as relevant to the issue. Furthermore, those who employ such frames in order to influence public opinion represent what Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues call “entrepreneurs of identity” (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010). This article investigates the effect that different framings of climate change have on the extent to which various group norms predict attitudes towards climate change.

Social influence in social identity theory

According to the social identity perspective, incorporating both social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), an individual’s self-concept comprises
not only personal identity, but also social identity, which is derived primarily from membership in social groups and categories. Numerous studies have shown that the extent to which one’s personal or social identity is salient can have a considerable impact on their perceptions, attitudes and behaviour (see Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994, for a review). In a context in which an individual’s personal identity is salient, their attitudes and behaviour accord with their own personal, idiosyncratic characteristics. However, when social identity is salient, people come to define themselves in terms of that particular social category or group and, through a process known as referent informational influence (Turner, 1985; Turner, 1991), their attitudes and behaviour come to be guided by what they perceive to be the norms of the group. Numerous studies have supported the referent informational influence model, with referent group norms predicting attitudes and behaviour, particularly for those who strongly identify with the reference group (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 1996, Terry, Hogg & White, 1999; Smith & Terry, 2003; Louis, Davies, Smith & Terry, 2007; Smith, Terry & Hogg, 2007; White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade & McKimmie, 2009).

However, even when a group identity is salient, those who strongly identify with the group will not be guided by group norms on every conceivable issue. Smith and colleagues found that the relationship between ingroup norms and attitudes and behavioural intentions was moderated by the perceived relevance of the issue to the group (Smith, Terry, Crosier & Duck, 2005). They concluded that, “individuals do not follow group norms automatically, but take into account the extent to which the issue and the norm are both relevant and central to group membership” (p. 168). This accords with evidence from ingroup persuasion studies which have found that ingroup messages lead to more
systematic processing only when the issue is seen as relevant to the group (Mackie, Worth & Asuncion, 1990; Wyer, 2010).

For some issues the group or social identity that is most relevant might be perfectly obvious. However, there is often ambiguity as to how relevant various groups are to a particular issue, or how relevant various issues are to a particular group. This ambiguity can be significant as different groups may be perceived to have different norms regarding an issue like climate change, and we would therefore expect very different attitudes and behaviour depending on which group or social identity was seen as most relevant (Reicher, 2004). Consider, for example, someone who lives in a region whose economy is heavily dependent upon coal mining, and is an active member of the local church. They may understand the norms of their religious group to favour conserving the environment, as God’s creation, for future generations. They may also understand that most people in their local community oppose any measures that threaten the viability of the coal industry. Based on the social identity perspective, we would expect that if they perceived the issue of climate change to be relevant to their religious group they would view the issue through the prism of that identity and their views would be shaped by the norms of their church. They would be inclined to see climate change as an urgent threat and support action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions regardless of the economic consequences. However, if they saw climate change as more relevant to their local coal-mining community, their interpretation of the issue would be more aligned with that group’s norms and they would be more likely to oppose action to address climate change on account of the economic costs. From this perspective, anything that affects the perceived relevance of climate change to the individual’s identity as a member of their
church or the mining community would, in turn, influence their attitude towards climate change.

The extent to which an individual sees an issue as relevant to a particular group (or a group to an issue) can be influenced by a range of factors including their personal experience and motivation, as well as objective features of the social context. For politically charged issues, however, the relevance of various group identities is often hotly contested, and those who seek to shape public opinion commonly do so by framing issues in order to highlight the relevance of particular groups and group norms (see Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a). This is just one of the influence strategies that Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b, Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997, Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, Reicher and Hopkins, 2001b; Reicher, 2004; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahanin-Hopkins, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010) describe in their work on entrepreneurs of identity. In this work, the researchers analyse the ways in which political leaders and other elites use rhetoric to fashion and promote a version of group identity that advances or reinforces their status as group leader and their agenda for group action. While this work draws upon a rich array of historical and contemporary examples to demonstrate how identity processes are harnessed to influence public attitudes and promote collective action, these processes have yet to be explored and demonstrated in an experimental setting.

**Issue frames**

The way in which issues are framed and the processes through which this influences attitudes has been the subject of considerable research under the banner of *issue framing*. Much of the research on issues framing is based on an
expectancy value model of attitudes (e.g. Azjen & Fishbein, 1980), according to which an individual’s attitude towards an object can be thought of as the weighted sum of a series of evaluative beliefs. From this perspective, frames provide meaning to an issue and influence attitudes by making particular underlying considerations about the issue seem more relevant such that they are given greater weight in forming the overall attitude. One example commonly cited in the literature involves attitudes towards a proposed public rally by a hate group. An individual might have a commitment to the notion of free speech, but also be concerned about the threat to public safety should the rally go ahead. In this case, a frame could influence an individual’s attitude by emphasising, for example, the free speech consideration over public safety. To the extent that the frame is successful in enhancing the weight ascribed to the free speech consideration, it would likely shift the individual’s attitudes in favour of the rally.

While this view of framing is well supported by experimental research (see Chong & Druckman, 2007), it rests on a limited, individualistic understanding of attitudes as “cognitive representations that are acquired and possessed by individuals and which, to a great extent, are a part of human individuality” (Hogg & Smith, 2007, p. 91). As a result, the framing literature has tended to focus largely on individual and inter-individual processes while neglecting the influence of social context in terms of the wider social environment of group memberships, group norms, social identities, intergroup relations and ideologies.

There have been notable exceptions that explore the important role of group-based attitudes (e.g. Nelson & Kinder, 1996), and even social identity and group norms (e.g. Price, 1989) in framing effects. While such research represents
an important step towards integrating the issue framing literature with an understanding of the role of social groups and social context, we extend these efforts by applying and measuring accepted social identity concepts in the context of a traditional issue framing paradigm.

The social psychology of climate change

Given the gravity of the threat posed by climate change, and the fact that action to address it requires cooperation by disparate groups, it is hardly surprising that there is growing interest in social psychological research on the issue. Indeed, the American Psychological Association (2009) issued a task force report outlining the need for a greater focus on the psychological dimension of climate change. Among the research to date is work by Kahan and colleagues which has sought to understand why the scientific consensus about the threat of climate change is not reflected in public attitudes. They cite evidence from the US context that the public is polarized along ideological and political lines with liberals largely convinced by the science and in favour of action to address the threat, while conservatives are sceptical of the claims of a scientific consensus, and the need to take drastic action (Kahan et al, 2012; Kahan, 2013; Kahan 2015; see also Bliuc, McGarty, Thomas, Lala, Berndsen & Misajon, 2015). In one study, participants with a ‘hierarchical/individualist’ world-view reported much lower perceptions of the risk associated with climate change than those with an ‘egalitarian/communitarian’ world-view. Analysis showed that scepticism about the risks was not due to a poor understanding of science; indeed, there was a slight negative correlation between scientific literacy and risk perception. The results also showed that the degree of polarization between those with different world-views was greater at higher levels of scientific literacy (Kahan et al, 2012). The
researchers explain these results with reference to what they term ‘cultural cognition’, a tendency for individuals to “form perceptions of societal risks that cohere with values characteristic of groups with which they identify” (Kahan et al, 2012, p. 732). This interpretation is based on the notion that the issue of climate change has become politically or ideologically charged; another front in the Culture war between liberals and conservatives. As such, individuals’ attitudes towards the issue are not so much a reflection of ‘what they know’ but of ‘who they are’ or ‘which side they are on’. In this sense, disagreement about an issue like climate change represents not the lack of reason, but the application of it in defence of one’s group identity.

“Individuals can be expected to use reason to apprehend both what is known to climate science and what stance toward climate-change information expresses their identity... it is the antagonistic cultural meanings that advocates on both sides have succeeded in infusing into their positions that creates for ordinary citizens the conflict between recognizing what is known to science and being who they are. Forced to choose, individuals predictably attend to information as identity-protective reasoners” (Kahan, 2015, p. 29).

This research confirms the American Psychological Association’s (2009) view that group identification can have a powerful impact on people’s attitudes and behaviours about climate change. The findings also accord with work by Morton and colleagues showing that judgements about science, particularly among people with scientific training, are influenced by identity concerns (Morton, Haslam, Postmes, Ryan, 2006). Despite some differences, there are many parallels between Kahan’s notion of cultural cognition and the social identity view that attitudes towards an issue like climate change can be influenced by group norms through a process of referent informational influence. Indeed,
research from the social identity perspective offers insights not only into how issues come to be invested with particular relevance for groups and group identities, but also how an understanding of these processes can be used to influence attitudes towards an issue like climate change. Research by Rabinovich and colleagues, for example, looked at how identity processes can influence attitudes towards climate change through shifts in the social context. They found that among a sample of British participants, changes in the comparative context (with either the United States or Sweden as a comparison group) led to changes in the ingroup (British) stereotype for environmentalism. These changes in ingroup stereotype, in turn, influenced individual values and ultimately influenced attitudes and behaviours regarding climate change (Rabinovich, Morton, Postmes, and Verplanken, 2012). This research underscores the importance of considering the role of identity and group influence on attitudes towards climate change, but also the power of the social context to shape the way we understand the relationship between group identity and issues.

**Overview of the present research**

The current research draws on the insights of previous research and seeks to extend it in important ways. While Rabinovich and colleagues (2012), for instance, explored how changes in comparative context affect attitudes by changing the content of the ingroup identity, we investigate whether the way the issue itself is framed can influence which group identity is seen as relevant, and therefore which group’s norms come to influence attitudes. The current research seeks to explore these processes in a way that reflects the (often subtle) rhetorical framing strategies that are employed in the political debate over climate change.
Based on the theory and research outlined above, we predict that framing climate change as a moral or economic issue (Study 1), or in ways that highlight the moral, economic or political dimensions involved (Study 2) will increase the perceived relevance of groups whose content has some resonance with these frames. This will lead to greater influence of those groups’ norms on individuals’ attitudes towards climate change. We also examine the extent to which the influence of group norms, and particularly the effect of framing on normative influence, will be moderated by individuals’ level of identification with the group (Studies 1 and 2), and predict the effect will be greater at higher levels of identification. In Study 2, we also investigate the role of political awareness in moderating the effect of the frames, and examine whether the effect is more pronounced among those with higher levels of political knowledge. Finally, we investigate whether the effect of framing is mediated by perceptions of the extent to which the issue of climate change is seen as relevant or central to the group identity.

**Study 1**

*Participants and Design*

A total of 444 people took part in the study. Participants were recruited via an email sent to post-graduate students at the Australian National University. The email included a short message about the survey, a link to the survey website, and a request to forward the email on to others, facilitating further snowball sampling. The sample comprised 233 females and 211 males, with a mean age of 33.61 years ($SD = 10.94$; range = 14 - 70 years). The design included three between-subjects conditions based on the type of frame participants were exposed to (control, moral frame, or economic frame).
Procedure

The survey was conducted in the weeks leading up to the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit in late 2009. Participants were supplied with the web address for the survey web page, which directed them randomly to one of three versions of an online survey hosted on an Australian National University web page. The three versions were identical in all respects except for the survey title and the introductory paragraph that contained the experimental manipulation (see below). The manipulation was intended to reflect the subtle use of issue frames such that they appear to be an incidental or uncontroversial part of the debate, rather than an explicit attempt to impose a contested interpretation on an issue. In the control condition, the survey was titled “Climate change – the greatest challenge of our time”, in the moral frame condition it was titled “Climate change – the greatest moral challenge of our time”, and in the economic frame condition it was titled “Climate change – the greatest economic challenge of our time”. This framing was also reflected in the introductory paragraph participants read before completing the survey items:

“When climate change has been described as the greatest [moral/economic] challenge of our time. As governments around the world grapple with how to respond to the challenge that climate change poses, we are interested in your thoughts [about/on the moral dimension of/on the economic dimension of] this issue.”

The words in square brackets indicate the differences between conditions.

After reading the introductory paragraph, participants completed demographic items about their age, sex and country of birth and their attitudes towards climate change. Participants then completed items measuring the nature
of their religious/spiritual orientation, their identification with people who share their religious/spiritual orientation, and their perception of the normative attitude towards climate change among those who share their religious/spiritual orientation. Participants were then asked about the nature of their socio-economic class, their identification with others who share their class, and their perception of the normative attitude towards climate change among those who share their socio-economic class.\textsuperscript{5} Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from \textit{Strongly Disagree} to \textit{Strongly Agree}, with a \textit{Neutral} mid-point.

\textit{Measures}

\textit{Climate change attitudes} were assessed via 10 items (e.g. “We all need to be prepared to make sacrifices if we want to avoid environmental catastrophe” – see Appendix A for a full list of items) specifically developed for the study. A scale score was calculated as the mean of the 10 item scores with higher scores indicating greater concern about climate change ($\alpha = .89$).

Participants were asked to identify their \textit{Religious/spiritual orientation} from a list of eight choices including \textit{Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, Spiritual but not religious, Agnostic}; and \textit{Atheist}.\textsuperscript{6} An ‘Other’ category was also provided for participants to nominate an orientation not in the list.

Participants were also asked to identify their \textit{Socio-economic class} from the

\textsuperscript{5}We also included two other self-categories in order to tap into participants’ moral and economic self-concept. Participants were asked to describe their \textit{values or belief system} as well as their \textit{occupational status} (e.g. professional, white collar, blue collar), before answering questions about their level of identification with, and the norms of, others who shared those characteristics. These were included for exploratory purposes, and as no effects emerged for either variable, in the interests of brevity, they will not be discussed further.

\textsuperscript{6}While atheists and agnostics are not commonly recognised as discrete social groups, Yseldyk, Matheson & Anisman (2010) make the point that many people are quite devout unbelievers and some people identify highly with others members of their irreligious group. Indeed, Yseldyk, Matheson & Anisman (2009) found that the responses of atheists to an identity threat was similar to that of religious individuals.
following categories: *Upper class, Middle class, Working class*, and *Poor*. An ‘Other’ category was also provided for participants to nominate a class not in the list. Responses to these items were not intended for analyses, but were included to ensure participants had a group in mind when responding to the identification and norm items (see Appendix B).

*Group identification* with those who share religious/spiritual beliefs and socio-economic class was each assessed via five items derived from Leach et al (2008). Items assessed solidarity with other members of the group, satisfaction with being a member of the group, the centrality of membership to one’s self-concept, degree of self-stereotyping with the group, and perceived in-group homogeneity. Scale scores were computed as the mean of the five items with higher scores indicating greater identification with religious/spiritual group (α = .79) and socio-economic class (α = .81), respectively.

*Perceived group norms regarding climate change* for both religious/spiritual group and socio-economic class were assessed via three items (see Appendix A). Separate scale scores were computed as the mean of the three items, with higher scores indicating greater perceptions of normative concern about climate change among the religious/spiritual group (α = .79), and socio-economic class (α = .72), respectively.

**Results**

*Data analysis overview*

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for each of the scales in the study, along with the alpha reliability coefficients for each. Reliabilities were all satisfactory. The mean for climate change attitudes was significantly above the
scale mid-point indicating a high degree of concern about climate change among
the sample. As can be seen in Table 1, the mean levels of identification and
perceived norms for each group type lie close to or slightly above the mean. Item
and scale distributions were assessed for violations of normality. Attitudes
towards climate change were found to be highly negatively skewed (Skewness = -
1.16, SE = .12) and were transformed via a log transformation (Skewness = -.27,
SE = .12) for subsequent analyses. It should be noted that the transformation does
not substantially alter the pattern of results reported below.

ANOVAs revealed no mean differences for the variables across the three
frame conditions. Attitudes towards climate change were positively correlated
with perceived religious/spiritual group norms. Climate change attitudes were not
correlated with perceived class norms, nor were attitudes correlated with
religious/spiritual or class identification. There was a small positive correlation
between religious/spiritual identification and class identification.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Climate change attitudes</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religious / spiritual identification</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Socio-economic class identification</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceived religious / spiritual norms</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Perceived socio-economic class norms</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Descriptive data for measures (means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations and reliabilities) – Study 1.*
A hierarchical moderated multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the effects of religious/spiritual group identification, class identification and perceived group norms (both separately, and their interaction) across experimental conditions on attitudes towards climate change. The main effects of group identification and group norms were entered at step one, the interaction of religious/spiritual group identification and group norms along with the interaction of class group identification and group norms were entered at step two, followed by the main effects of frame condition and their respective two- and three-way interactions with group identification and norms at step three. The comparisons between frame conditions were effect coded via two variables: 1 (moral frame) vs. −1 (control); and 1 (economic frame) vs. −1 (control). In all cases centred scores were used to calculate the interaction terms to ensure that multicollinearity between the main effects and interaction terms did not distort the results (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003). A significant proportion of the variance in attitudes towards climate change was accounted for at step one, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .13$, $F_{\text{change}} (4, 412) = 16.87, p < .001$. The inclusion of the identification x norms interaction terms at step two accounted for a significant increase in the amount of variance explained, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .05$, $F_{\text{change}} (2, 410) = 12.81, p < .001$, as did the addition of the frame conditions and the associated interaction terms at step three, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .07$, $F_{\text{change}} (14, 396) = 2.55, p < .01$. 
Table 2. Association between Religious and Class identification, Religious and Class group norms, Frame condition and Climate change attitudes – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual Identification</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>7.65</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Identification</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-1.70</td>
<td>.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral frame</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>.748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic frame</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.92</td>
<td>.357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification x Moral frame</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification x Economic frame</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.76</td>
<td>.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification x Moral frame</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification x Economic frame</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistics reported for the step when variables are first entered into the model.

**Identification and norms**

The regression analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between religious/spiritual group norms and climate change attitudes. Contrary to expectations, the relationship between religious/spiritual group norms and attitudes was not moderated by identification, however the two-way interaction was moderated by frame condition, as discussed in the following section.

As for the influence of perceived class group norms, the marginal positive relationship with attitudes towards climate change was moderated by the level of class identification. Analysis of the simple slopes revealed that the influence of perceived group norms was not significant at higher levels of class identification, $B = .08, t = 1.15, p < .25, CI = [-.06, .21]$. At lower levels of class identification,
however, there was a significant negative relationship between perceived class norms and attitudes, $B = -.26, t = -3.69, p < .001, \text{CI} = [-.40, -.12]$. That is, at higher levels of class identification there was no relationship between group norms and attitudes towards climate change, while at lower levels of class identification there was a negative relationship between group norms and attitudes. Again, though, the interaction of class group norms and identification was further moderated by frame condition, as discussed below. We report the two-way effects first simply to demonstrate that the overall pattern is consistent with the traditional referent informational influence pattern, with some minor variations.

*The effect of framing – religious/spiritual group*

We tested the prediction that the way climate change was framed would moderate the influence of perceived group norms among high identifiers. We found that the moral frame did qualify the interaction between religious/spiritual group identification and norms. However, contrary to expectations, this effect was found only at lower levels of religious/spiritual identification. Simple slope analyses presented in Figure 1 show that among higher religious/spiritual identifiers, the relationship between perceived religious/spiritual group norms and climate change attitudes was significantly positive in both the control condition, $B = .09, t = 6.35, p < .001, \text{CI} = [.06, .12]$, and the moral frame condition, $B = .10, t = 4.63, p < .001, \text{CI} = [.06, .14]$.

There was, however, an effect of the frame for lower identifiers. As shown in Figure 2, there was a positive relationship between perceived religious/spiritual norms and climate change attitudes among lower identifiers in the control condition, $B = .09, t = 4.23, p < .001, \text{CI} = [.05, .13]$, but no relationship between
perceived norms and attitudes in the moral frame condition, \( B = -0.01, t = -0.25, p = 0.803, \text{CI} = [-0.07, 0.05] \), indicating that the positive normative influence for lower identifiers found in the control condition was undermined by framing climate change as a moral issue.\(^7\)

\(^7\)Separate analyses were conducted for participants who identified with a recognised religious group and those who identified as what might be called ‘non-believers’ (e.g. agnostic, atheist, etc.). The results indicate that the general pattern of results is consistent across both groups: a significant positive relationship between group norms and attitudes towards climate change among low identifiers in the control condition, but not in the moral frame condition.
**Figure 1.** Interaction of religious/spiritual identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of religious/spiritual identification, across control and moral frame condition – Study 1.

**Figure 2.** Interaction of religious/spiritual identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at lower levels of religious/spiritual identification, across control and moral frame condition – Study 1.
**Effects of framing - Socio-economic class**

As with religious/spiritual group norms, frame condition qualified the interaction between class group identification and norms. As expected, it was the contrast between the economic frame and the control condition where the effect was found. Analysis of the simple slopes presented in Figure 3 show that while there was no relationship between perceived class norms and climate change attitudes at higher levels of class identification in the control condition, $B = .00, t = .06, p = .953, CI = [-.03, .03]$, the relationship was significantly positive in the economic frame condition, $B = .04, t = 2.11, p = .037, CI = [.00, .07]$. Thus, while there was no evidence that group norms predicted attitudes among those highly identified with their class group in the control condition, the fact that this relationship emerged when climate change was framed as an economic issue supports the predicted effect of the frame.

Framing climate change as an economic issue also had an unexpected impact at lower levels of class identification. As shown in Figure 4, at higher levels of class identification, there was no relationship between perceived class norms and climate change attitudes at lower levels of class identification in the control condition, $B = .00, t = -.01, p = .995, CI = [-.04, .04]$; but when climate change was framed as an economic issue, there was a significant negative relationship between perceived norms and attitudes among those with low levels of class identification, $B = -.09, t = -4.97, p < .001, CI = [-.13, -.05]$. Thus, just as with low religious/spiritual identifiers, framing climate change in a way that highlighted a relevant identity appeared to undermine the influence of the group. However, rather than negate conformity to group norms, the economic frame
seemed to generate reactance against group norms among those with low levels of class identification.

Figure 3. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of class identification, across control and economic frame condition—Study 1.
Discussion

The results of Study 1 confirm the prediction that both religious/spiritual group and class group norms would be positively related to attitudes towards climate change among those highly identified with the group, particularly when the issue was framed in a way designed to resonate with the content of the group identity. The positive relationship between class group norms and climate change attitudes was only evident among those highly identified with their class group who were exposed to the economic frame, suggesting that the frame was successful in establishing the relevance of the issue to the group. The relationship between norms and attitudes among those highly identified with their religious/spiritual group was evident in both the control condition and the moral frame condition, indicating that high identifiers saw the group as relevant to the issue regardless of framing, and the moral frame served to reinforce rather than enhance this impression. This will be discussed in greater detail in the General Discussion.

The results for low identifiers were somewhat different. The moral frame worked to negate the positive relationship between group norms and attitudes among low religious/spiritual group identifiers. The economic frame saw a negative relationship between class group norms and attitudes among low class identifiers. While framing effects were not expected among low identifiers, both of these results are consistent with the notion that the frame established a link between the issue and the group. The fact that this link eliminated the relationship
between group norms and attitudes among low religious/spiritual group
identifiers, while producing a negative relationship among low class identifiers
may reflect the different nature of these group identities. This too will be explored
in more depth in the General Discussion.

The results of Study 1 provide strong evidence that framing can shape
attitudes towards an issue like climate change by influencing the group identities
through which people understand and view the issue. However, there are a
number of factors that remain to be clarified. First, while the results strongly
suggest that the frame worked to establish the relevance of the issue to the group
identity (particularly the economic frame in relation to class identity), something
that previous theory (e.g. Turner, 1987) and research (e.g. Mackie et al, 1990)
suggest is an important factor in group-based social influence that produces
meaningful attitudes change. However, as the concept of relevance was not
measured in Study 1, this mediation process is yet to be fully demonstrated. This
is something that will be addressed in Study 2. Secondly, the frame manipulations
used in Study 1 were designed to be quite subtle in their evocation of social
identities. It remains to be seen what effect more elaborate frames that are more
directly related to specific group identities will have. Furthermore, in recognition
of the fact that there is often a political divide in attitudes towards climate change
(Kahan, et al, 2012, Kahan, 2015; McCright & Dunlap, 2011; Krosnick,
Hollbrook & Visser, 2000), it is also interesting to explore the effect of a political
frame along with partisan identity and norms.

It should be noted that the sample for Study 1 was made up largely of
postgraduate university students who are likely to have a high degree of political
awareness, something which has been shown to moderate the effect of issue
frames (Slohuus, 2008; Slohuus & de Vreese, 2010) on the basis that such awareness is associated with increased ability and motivation to interpret and understand the import of frames. The question remains whether these effects will generalise to a more diverse sample and whether indeed they will be limited to those with high levels of political awareness. Finally, as mentioned previously, Study 1 was conducted at a place and time (in Australia in the lead up to the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit) when climate change was a highly salient issue both in the media and in the political debate. As such, it remains to be seen whether these results will be replicated in a context in which the issue is not such a dominant part of public debate.

**Study 2**

*Participants and Design*

A total of 306 people took part in the study. Participants were recruited via an online polling organisation in the United Kingdom and represented a more diverse general population compared with Study 1. Participants received credits for completing the survey, which could be exchanged for consumer products. Thirty participants were excluded prior to analysis as they had completed the survey in less time (7 minutes) than was deemed necessary to provide genuine responses.\(^8\) The remaining sample comprised 143 females and 133 males, with a mean age of 48.85 years (\(SD = 15.05\)). The design included four between-subjects conditions based on the type of frame participants were exposed to (control, moral frame, economic frame, political frame).

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\(^8\)Study 2 was conducted with different software to Study 1. As the software used for Study 1 did not capture the times at which respondents started and finished the survey, we were not able to exclude any responses from Study 1 based on the amount of time taken to complete the survey.
Procedure

Participants were supplied with the web address for the survey web page, which directed them randomly to one of four versions of an online survey hosted on an Australian National University web page. The four versions were identical in all respects except for the survey title and the introductory paragraph that contained the experimental manipulation (see below). While the frame manipulations were similar to those of Study 1 in that they did not refer directly to specific groups, the frames in Study 2 employed a more elaborate structure in order to establish the relevance of climate change to various group identities. In the control condition, the survey was titled “Attitudes towards climate change”. In the other frame conditions it was titled “Climate change – the greatest [moral/economic/political] challenge of our time”, respectively. The title was displayed on all subsequent survey webpages. In the moral, economic and political frame conditions, this framing was also reflected in the introductory paragraphs participants read before completing the survey items. The first and last paragraphs of the frames were similar across the three frame conditions - the words in square brackets below indicate the differences between conditions.

First paragraph

*Climate change is one of the most pressing problems we face as a community. There are arguments about how serious the problem is and what should be done about it, but at a deeper level, climate change forces us to confront fundamental [moral questions / questions about the nature of our economy and society / political questions].*

Last paragraph
To help us understand the many varied perspectives, in the remainder of the survey, we are interested in your attitudes about climate change and what you perceive to be the views held by others."

The crux of the frame manipulations were contained in the second and third paragraphs which framed climate change as a contrast between conflicting perspectives on the issue. The moral frame condition described climate change as a contrast between a religious or spiritual perspective in which the natural environment is seen as a sacred gift to be preserved, against a more secular view that sees nature simply as a source of resources. The economic frame presented climate change as challenge to the economic structure of society with consequences for those both at the top of the economic and social structure, as well as those at middle and lower ends. The political frame described the issue in terms of wealth and autonomy as opposed to sustainability and fairness (see Appendix C for the full frames).

After reading the introductory paragraph, participants completed questions about their attitudes towards climate change. They then completed questions about their religious or spiritual orientation, their socio-economic class, and their political affiliation. On subsequent pages, participants were asked about their level of identification with those who shared their religious or spiritual orientation, their perception of the normative attitudes towards climate change among those who shared with religious or spiritual orientation, as well as the extent to which they regard the issue of climate change to be relevant to being a member of that particular group. Participants were also asked similar questions about those who shared their socio-economic class and political affiliation. In all cases, the order of presentation across the three groups was randomised. Finally, participants were
asked a number of questions to gauge their level of political knowledge. Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, with a *Neutral* mid-point.

**Measures**

*Climate change attitudes* were assessed via eight items (e.g. “Reducing the amount of carbon-dioxide humans emit into the atmosphere is vital if we are to combat climate change” – see Appendix A for a full list of items). The items used were adapted slightly from those used in Study 1 to account for the different context (e.g. removing “Australia should introduce an emissions trading scheme as soon as possible to reduce carbon emissions”). A scale score was calculated as the mean of the item scores with higher scores indicating greater concern about climate change ($\alpha = .90$).

*Identification* with each of the three groups included in the study was measured with the same five items derived from Leach et al (2008) that were used in Study 1. Separate scale scores were computed as the mean of the five items, with higher scores indicating greater identification with the religious/spiritual ($\alpha = .92$), class ($\alpha = .90$), and political group ($\alpha = .93$), respectively.

*Perceived group norms regarding climate change* for both religious/spiritual group and socio-economic class and political groups were assessed via the same three items from Study 1, with the addition of a fourth item measuring perceived norms about the extent to which humans are responsible for climate change (“A typical […….] would believe that human activity is largely responsible for climate change.”). Separate scale scores were computed as the mean of the four items, with higher scores indicating greater perceptions of
normative concern about climate change among the religious/spiritual group ($\alpha = .94$), class group ($\alpha = .95$), and political group ($\alpha = .95$), respectively.

The perceived relevance of climate change to each of the three groups was measured with a single item (“How important is the issue of climate change to what it means to be a [………].”).

In line with previous work (e.g. Zaller, 1992; Slothuus, 2008; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010), participants’ level of political knowledge was measured via eight factual multiple-choice questions (including an ‘Unsure’ option) about contemporary and historical UK politics (e.g. “Who is the current speaker in the House of Commons?” – see Appendix A for a full list of items). A scale score was calculated as the number of items answered correctly, with higher scores indicating greater political knowledge ($\alpha = .75$).

**Results**

**Data analysis overview**

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics for each of the scales in the study, along with the alpha reliability coefficients for each. Reliabilities were all satisfactory. The mean for climate change attitudes was significantly above the scale mid-point indicating a moderate to high degree of concern for climate change among the sample. The mean levels of identification for each of the three groups was above the above the scale mid-point, as were the perceived norms for each of the three groups, and the perceived relevance of climate change to each of the three groups.

ANOVAs revealed no mean differences for the variables across the four frame conditions. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a weak but significant
correlation between climate change attitudes and religious/spiritual group identification. Attitudes towards climate change were also moderately correlated with perceived norms for each of religious/spiritual, class and political group norms. Identification with each of the three groups was moderately correlated with each other, and there were moderate positive correlations between the perceived norms of the three identity groups.
Table 3. Descriptive data for measures (means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations and reliabilities) – Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Climate change attitudes</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religious / spiritual identification</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Socio-economic class</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Political party identification</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Perceived religious / spiritual norms</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Perceived socio-economic norms</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Perceived political party norms</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Relevance to religious/spiritual group</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Relevance to socio-economic class</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.63*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Relevance to political party</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Political knowledge</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01.
The effect of the identification and norms for each of the three groups, framing and political knowledge and their interactions on climate change attitudes was analysed via a hierarchical moderated multiple regression. As with Study 1, the main effects of group identification and group norms were entered at step one, the interaction of group identification and the respective group norms were entered at step two, followed by the main effects of frame condition and their respective two- and three-way interactions with group identification and norms at step three. The comparisons between frame conditions were effect coded via three variables: 1 (moral frame) vs. –1 (control); 1 (economic frame) vs. –1 (control); and 1 (political frame) vs. -1 (control). The main effect of political knowledge along with the interaction terms were entered at step four. In all cases centred scores were used to calculate the interaction terms to ensure that multicolinearity between the main effects and interaction terms did not distort the results (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West & Aiken, 2003). A significant proportion of the variance in attitudes towards climate change was accounted for at step one $R^2_{\text{change}} = .35$, $F_{\text{change}}(6, 260) = 22.87, p < .001$, as well as at step two with the inclusion of the identification x norms interaction terms $R^2_{\text{change}} = .06$, $F_{\text{change}}(3, 257) = 8.41, p < .001$. The addition of the frame conditions and their interactions did not significantly add to the explained variance, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .09$, $F_{\text{change}}(30, 227) = 1.30, p = .144$, however the inclusion of political knowledge and its interactions accounted for a marginally significant increase in explained variance at step four, $R^2_{\text{change}} = .12$, $F_{\text{change}}(40, 187) = 1.40, p = .07$. To contextualise these higher order interactions completely we will first examine all the relevant lower level effects.
Table 4. Association between Religious, Class and Partisan identification, Perceived group norms, Frame condition and Climate change attitudes by level of Political knowledge - Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Low Political Knowledge</th>
<th>High Political knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual Identification</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm</td>
<td>.12†</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Identification</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Identification</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan norm</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.28†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification</td>
<td>.06†</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification</td>
<td>.08*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan norm x Identification</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral frame</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic frame</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political frame</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification x Moral frame</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification x Economic frame</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-.40†</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/spiritual norm x Identification x Political frame</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification x Moral frame</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification x Economic frame</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class norm x Identification x Political frame</td>
<td>.13†</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.44*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan norm x Identification x Moral frame</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
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<td>Partisan norm x Identification x Economic frame</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partisan norm x Identification x Political frame</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers represent unstandardised regression coefficients reported for the step when variables are first entered into the model.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; † $p < .10$
Identification and norms

The regression analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between class identification and climate change attitudes, $B = -.13$, $t = -2.73$, $p = .018$, CI = [-.24, -.02], but no main effect of either religious/spiritual identification, or partisan identification. There was also a significant positive relationship between attitudes and class norms, $B = .27$, $t = 4.64$, $p < .001$, CI = [.16, .39], and partisan norms, $B = .31$, $t = 4.50$, $p < .001$, CI = [.17, .44], and a marginally significant positive effect of religious/spiritual group norms, $B = .12$, $t = 1.92$, $p = .054$, CI = [-.00, .24]. The relationship between both class norms and religious/spiritual group norms and attitudes were moderated by level of identification with those groups, with the relationship being significant at higher levels of identification. Level of identification did not moderate the relationship between partisan norms and attitudes.

The effect of framing

Unlike the moral frame in Study 1, in this case the moral frame had no impact on the relationship between religious/spiritual group norms and climate change attitudes. Similarly, the economic frame did not have any impact on the relationship between class group norms and attitudes, nor did the political frame moderate the relationship between partisan norms and climate change attitudes.\(^9\)

\(^9\) There was a significant effect of the economic frame on the religious/spiritual norms x identification interaction, $B = -.17$, $t = -2.21$, $p = .028$, CI = [-.33, -.02]. As the addition of the frames did not account for a significant increase in the variance explained, this result was not discussed in the body. There was a significant effect of the moral frame on the class norms x political knowledge interaction, $B = .17$, $t = 2.19$, $p = .030$, CI = [.02, .33]. Analysis of the simple slopes indicates that the relationship between class norms and attitudes at high levels of political knowledge was marginally significant in the control condition, $B = .32$, $t = 1.93$, $p = .06$, CI = [-.01, .66] and significant in the moral frame condition, $B = .59$, $t = 2.13$, $p = .038$, CI = [.03, 1.14]. At lower levels of political knowledge, the relationship between class norms and attitudes was not significant in either the control, $B = .32$, $t = 1.25$, $p = .219$, CI = [-.20, .84], or the moral frame condition, $B = -.45$, $t = -1.43$, $p = .159$, CI = [-1.07, .10].
The most notable of the framing effects was a marginally significant four-way interaction of the impact of the political frame on the relationship between class norms and attitudes in interaction with class identification and political knowledge, $B = .10, t = 1.96, p = .052, CI = [-.00, .20]$. Investigation of the simple interaction terms indicated that the effect of the political frame on the interaction of class norms and identification was significant at high levels of political knowledge, $B = .44, t = 2.81, p = .006, CI = [.13, .75]$, but not at low levels, $B = .02, t = 0.18, p = .857, CI = [-.24, .29]$. Further investigation of the simple slopes presented in Figures 5 and 6 shows that among those with higher levels of political knowledge there was no relationship between class norms and climate change attitudes in the control condition at either high levels of identification, $B = .28, t = 1.26, p = .214, CI = [-.17, .72]$, or low levels of identification, $B = .44, t = 1.63, p = .11, CI = [-.11, .99]$. However, among those exposed to the political frame, there was a positive relationship between class norms and attitudes at high levels of identification, $B = 1.11, t = 3.05, p = .004, CI = [.38, 1.84]$, and a negative relationship at low levels of identification, $B = -.79, t = -2.93, p = .005, CI = [-1.34, -.25]$. Thus, the effect of the political frame in Study 2 among those with higher levels of political knowledge mirrors that of the economic frame in Study 1, in that it produced a positive relationship between group norms and attitudes among high class identifiers while producing a negative relationship among low class identifiers.
Figure 5. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of political knowledge and lower levels of class identification, across control and political frame condition – Study 2.

Figure 6. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of political knowledge and higher levels of class identification, across control and political frame condition – Study 2.
Mediation analysis

Analysis of the simple correlations revealed an interesting pattern of relationships. First, there was a positive relationship between the political frame and the perceived relevance of climate change to the class group. There was also a positive correlation between perceptions of relevance and perceived class norms about climate change, along with a positive correlation between perceived class norms and attitudes towards climate change. As such, we tested whether the political frame had an indirect effect on attitudes towards climate change that was mediated through perceptions of relevance to the class group and perceived class norms (see Figure 7.). We used Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 6) to test for this dual-mediation effect, bootstrapping (10,000 iterations). The results indicated that there was a significant positive indirect effect of the political frame on climate change attitudes through perceived relevance to the class group and perceived class norms, B = .06, bias corrected 95% CI = [.01, .13]. Neither of the simpler mediation effects from the political frame to climate change attitudes within this model (i.e. through perceived relevance or perceived norms, alone) was significant. The results indicate that the political frame led participants to perceive the issue of climate change to be of greater relevance to their class group which in turn led them to perceive greater normative concern about climate change. This was then reflected in participants’ attitudes towards climate change.
Figure 7. Mediation model for the effect of the political frame on climate change attitudes with perceived relevance to class group and perceived class norms as mediators – Study 2.
Discussion

The results of Study 2 largely replicate and extend the findings of Study 1. As in Study 1, we found that group norms exert a positive influence on attitudes towards climate change. As in Study 1, class norms had no relationship with climate change attitudes in the control condition, but framing (in this case the political frame) led to a positive relationship between group norms and attitudes among those highly identified with their class group, and a negative relationship among low identifiers. In addition, Study 2 extended the results by showing that this effect of the frame was limited to those with higher levels of political knowledge. In this sense, the results accord with evidence from previous research on framing (Slothuus, 2008, Slothuus & de Vresse, 2010). Furthermore, mediation analysis indicated that the political frame also had an indirect effect on climate change attitudes by increasing the extent to which participants saw the issue as relevant to their class group, and increasing the perceived normative concern about the issue. Taken together, these results confirm that framing can influence attitudes through a process of referent informational influence (Turner et al, 1987) by establishing the relevance of a particular group identity to the issue, such that individual’s attitudes come to be a reflection of the group’s norms and their relationship to the group.

General Discussion

Drawing on the social identity understanding of attitudes and social influence, the present research aimed to investigate whether the way an issue is framed can affect the perceived relevance of various social identities and the extent to which the norms associated with those identities predict attitudes
towards the issue. Across two studies, participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in which climate change was framed as either a moral, economic, or political (Study 2 only) issue, or in the absence of such a frame. We tested the prediction that the attitudes towards climate change of those highly identified with their religious/spiritual, class and partisan group would reflect perceived group norms, and particularly so when climate change was framed in a way that emphasised the relevance of the issue to that specific group. We also investigated the effect of framing among those who did not highly identify with these groups.

There was a consistent pattern across both studies that group norms positively predicted the climate change attitudes of highly identified group members. In both studies, as expected, group norms predicted attitudes of those highly identified with their religious/spiritual group, a relationship that was found across framing conditions. Likewise, in Study 2, the attitudes of those highly identified with their partisan group were positively related to partisan group norms regardless of how climate change was framed. For those highly identified with their class group, however, we found that the relationship between group norms and climate change attitudes was contingent on the issue being framed in a way that highlighted the relevance of the issue to that group identity. In Study 1, this effect was found across the highly educated sample, whereas in Study 2 it was limited to those with higher levels of political knowledge.

The findings for group members with lower levels of identification were somewhat different. In the absence of a specific frame in both studies there was no relationship between class group norms and attitudes towards climate change at low levels of identification. However, among low identifiers exposed to a frame
that emphasised the relevance of climate change to class identity, group norms had a negative influence on attitudes. That is, framing led those with little sense of identification to their class group to report attitudes that were at odds with their understanding of the group norm. Again, the effect was found across a highly educated sample in Study 1, and in Study 2 was limited to those with higher levels of political knowledge.

Framing also had an effect on the relationship between group norms and attitudes among low religious/spiritual group identifiers in Study 1. In the control condition, there was a positive relationship between religious/spiritual group norms and attitudes among low identifiers, however this relationship was non-significant among those exposed to the moral frame. That is, framing climate change in a way that highlighted its relevance to the religious/spiritual identity undermined the relationship between group norms and attitudes among low identifiers.

This pattern of results supports the notion that framing can influence the extent to which people view the issue of climate change through the prism of various group identities. Participants’ attitudes towards climate change became, at least in part, an expression of their relationship to the group. When climate change was framed as a moral issue in Study 1, those who were highly identified with their religious/spiritual group were influenced by their understanding of the group norms, while those who felt little identification with their religious/spiritual group effectively disregarded the norms of the group when considering their attitudes towards climate change. Similarly, when climate change was framed as an economic issue (Study 1), or a political issue (Study 2), those who were highly identified with their class group gravitated towards the normative position of the
group, while those with lower levels of class group identification reported attitudes that were polarised away from what they perceived to be the group norm. In other words, participants with higher levels of identification displayed greater fidelity to group norms, particularly when the frame linked the group to the issue of climate change.

While the results of the frame manipulations were largely consistent with those hypothesised, it is worth considering why neither the moral nor economic frames had an impact on attitudes in Study 2, and why it was that the political rather than economic frame that appeared had an affect via class identity and norms in Study 2. The fact that neither the moral nor economic frames had the predicted effects indicates that they were not successful in establishing or accentuating the extent to which participants viewed their religious/spiritual, class or partisan identity as relevant to the climate change. That is, either participants did not find the frames convincing or compelling in terms of influencing their understanding of the social meaning of climate change and it alignment with the content of their religious/spiritual, class or partisan identity. Or, perhaps these frames were similar in content to those participants had already encountered in public discourse and thus had no additional effect in establishing the relevance of climate change to those identity groups.

The fact that the political frame had an impact on class identity rather than partisan identity indicates that the content of the frame in some way resonated with the meaning participants ascribed to their class identity, more so than their partisan identity. This is understandable given that the different political parties in the UK represent, to some degree, class-based interests and these interests are often implicated in political debate. Indeed, the political frame did not explicitly
identify the various political parties, but it did link climate change to questions of wealth and fairness, which may have evoked participants’ sense of class identity. In any case, our primary interest is this research is not so much determining what element of the frame was pivotal in establishing the relevance of the issue to the group identity, but demonstrating that it can do so, and can thereby influence participants’ attitudes.

One notable aspect of the results, particularly in Study 1, was the strong main effect of religious/spiritual group norms across the sample. This may be a product of the tenor of the public debate about climate change in Australia at the time of the study - in the weeks leading up to the Copenhagen climate change summit. At that time, both the government and the main opposition party in Australia supported the introduction of an emissions trading scheme and planned to use the Copenhagen summit to lobby other countries to take similar action. The dominant frame from both sides of politics, as reflected in the media coverage, was that climate change was an existential threat to the future of the planet. The economic frame had largely been relegated to the margins. In this context, it is hardly surprising that participants, even those highly identified with their economic group, should interpret the issue through the moral prism and connect it to a group that resonated with that frame. Participants in the control condition may have been operating on the basis of an implicit moral frame. This accords with the findings of Sniderman and Theriault (2004) who noted that a “frame can be a sufficient condition to define an issue. But it is not a necessary one. Issues can be meaningful even in the absence of a ‘frame’” (p. 151). To the extent that they interpreted the issue in moral terms even in the absence of an explicit moral frame, it follows that those highly identified with their religious/spiritual group
would report attitudes in line with group norms. While the moral frame may have made this connection explicit, it served merely to reinforce rather than accentuate the existing normative influence among high identifiers. As the economic element of the issue was less salient, it was only when the economic frame made the connection between climate change and the class group explicit that high identifiers conformed to the norms of their class group.

It is also worth considering why in both studies framing produced a negative relationship between group norms and the attitudes of low class identifiers, particularly when the effect of group norms among low religious/spiritual group and partisan group identifiers were either mildly positive or not apparent at all. The answer may have something to do with the nature of these respective identities. For most people, religious/spiritual orientation and party affiliation is voluntarily chosen and one can change or redefine them as they see fit. Furthermore, with respect to religious/spiritual orientation, we provided a range of identity options such that someone who had disavowed an erstwhile religious affiliation such as Christianity (for example) could identify as an agnostic or atheist rather than as a low-identified Christian. As such, a low level of identification with those who share the same religious/spiritual orientation or party affiliation likely indicates that that particular aspect of identity is not generally an important element of the individual’s self-concept; it implies neutrality, or a lack of valence, rather than negative valence. Once the moral frame in Study 1 linked religious/spiritual identity to the issue of climate change it prompted low identifiers to dismiss those group norms as irrelevant in formulating their attitudes. Respondents’ understanding of religious/spiritual group norms thus had little or no bearing on their reported attitude towards climate change. Class,
by contrast, is usually understood as a function of one’s family background, education, profession, or material living standard and is therefore not so readily assumed or redefined as a simple act of will. Consequently, a low level of class identification is more likely to be indicative of a negative attitude towards the group and that aspect of one’s identity. Therefore, once the economic (Study 1) or political (Study 2) frame linked climate change to their class identity, the negative valence associated with the identity among low identifiers led them to not simply disregard the group norms, but to actively repudiate them.

Theoretical implications

These findings contribute to the literature on social identity processes of social influence in a number of ways. The results provide experimental support for the work of Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a, Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b, Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997, Reicher & Hopkins, 2001a, Reicher and Hopkins, 2001b; Reicher, 2004; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010) on the effects of political rhetoric on the identities through which people understand political issues. In particular, the current research demonstrates that the way an issue is framed in public debate can affect the likelihood that particular social identities will be used to give meaning to the issue, and the extent to which the associated group norms will influence attitudes. As framing is just one of the means entrepreneurs of identity use to influence public opinion, future research should seek to investigate other strategies, such as how and when political elites are able to successfully redefine group boundaries.

By demonstrating that linking an issue to particular groups can lead group norms to exert a negative influence on the attitudes of low identifiers, these
findings also raise interesting questions about the process of group-based social influence. Our results suggest that the process of group-based social influence is not only relevant to high identifiers (see Terry & Hogg, 1996; Terry et al., 1999), but can also have a reciprocal effect among low identifiers. Group-based social influence could be seen as a symmetrical process of attraction to, and repulsion from, group norms, depending on the salience of the referent group, the level of identification, and the meaning associated with the group. Taken together with previous research showing that people react against the position espoused by outgroup sources (e.g. Mackie & Queller, 2000; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010), the current results suggest that, at least in some cases, people will also react against the position of ingroups. As such, it may be useful for researchers to distinguish ingroups for which people feel positive, neutral or negative valence, in addition to distinguishing between ingroups and outgroups.

The varying effects of the frames, from positive effects among high identifiers to negative effects among low identifiers, to no effect at all, suggest that those who receive such messages will interpret them in light of their existing understanding of the groups and issues involved. As such, those who seek to manipulate the meanings people attach to issues and groups need to start from a solid understanding of the existing meanings, and the range of meanings that their targets may be willing to accept - much like the latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment in Sherif and Hovland’s (1961) study of attitudes - and work to find areas of potential overlap or alignment between the meaning of the issue and the content of the group.

The fact that the frames were effective among a highly educated sample (Study 1) and among those with high levels of political awareness (Study 2)
suggests that interpreting frames in such a way as to recognise the alignment between issue and group meaning (i.e. relevance) is not always straightforward, particularly when the frame does not explicitly draw the connection. In these cases, it may be that a requisite level of ability and motivation on the part of the recipient (more common among the politically aware) is a necessary, if not a sufficient, pre-condition for this type of identity-based frame to have an impact on attitudes. This lends further credence to the notion that group-based social influence can result from a thoughtful, rational process (Mackie, et al, 1990; 1992, Wyer, 2010; Kahan et al, 2012; Kahan, 2013). The results accord with previous research showing that people do not simply conform to group norms on any given issue; that the extent to which they are influenced by group norms on a given issue is critically dependent upon how relevant they see their group identity to that issue (Smith, et al, 2005), as well as how they feel about the group. Similarly, the fact that the political frame had a direct impact on attitudes (moderated by group identity and norms) at high levels of political knowledge and an indirect effect (mediated by group relevance and norms) that was independent of political knowledge adds to previous findings from the issue framing literature (Slothuus, 2008; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010), which indicate that political awareness moderates not only the effect of issue frames, but also the process through which they operate.

In confirming the importance of group norms in shaping people’s attitudes towards climate change, these results are also in line with research indicating that attitudes towards climate change are as much an expression of ‘with whom one stands’ as ‘what one knows’ on the issue (Kahan et al, 2012; Kahan 2013; Kahan, 2015, Bliuc et al, 2015). Moreover, the current research offers valuable insights
into the process by which issues come to be seen as relevant to particular group identities, and, importantly, how these associations might be influenced through framing.

On a more practical level, the results highlight the benefits of measuring group identification, even in studies where identity salience is manipulated. While many studies assume that an in-group will be self-defining when made highly salient, this may not be the case for low identifiers. Participants may report that they are a member of a group (e.g. social class, university), but not identify strongly with the group even when it is made salient. The results of the current study suggest that the effect of salience manipulations can be very different depending on the level of identification.

The current research also has implications for the literature on issue framing, demonstrating the importance of considering group processes and a broader understanding of the social context in which attitudes are formed and influenced (see Hogg & Smith, 2007). The findings support Nelson and Kinder’s (1996) assertion that group-centrism plays a significant role in public opinion and can vary according to how issues are framed. However, the results take this one step further by highlighting the role that social identity processes play in this group-centrism. That is, issue frames can enhance the perceived relevance of a particular group identity, leading to a process of referent informational influence whereby individuals’ attitudes are influenced by the perceived norms of the group. This is compatible with the traditional understanding of attitudes based on expectancy value models (see Azjen & Fishbein, 1980), but extends it by suggesting that frames not only influence the range or relative weight of considerations that bear on individuals’ attitudes, they can also influence how
people see themselves in relation to the issue, and how this impacts on their understanding of the issue as well as the groups and group norms that are relevant to it. As such, these findings complement previous research in the area (Price, 1989), and indicate that frames need not refer explicitly to groups or group conflict in order to establish the relevance of groups to an issue. Even subtle frames that merely allude to or resonate with the content of group identities can lead recipients to view the issue through the prism of group membership.

On a practical level, the present research lends weight to the American Psychological Association’s (2009) call for psychologists to investigate the human dimension of climate change. They suggest that the nature of the political debate about climate change can have a considerable impact on public attitudes. Moreover, to the extent that entrepreneurs of identity can influence the way an issue like climate change is discussed and characterised in public debate, they can hold considerable sway over public opinion. However, the findings also sound a note of caution, in that framing can lead to unintended consequences, repelling low identifiers away from group norms as much as attracting high identifiers toward them.

To the extent that the issue’s association with ideological Culture wars presents a barrier to achieving a public and political consensus about taking action to address climate change, these results offer some cause for optimism. They suggest that such associations should not be taken as a necessary or inevitable part of the equation; that there is scope to shift the social meaning of an issue like climate change and the types of identities that are connected to it. Identifying what would be the ideal strategy is not the aim of the current paper, however, it would make sense to frame climate change messages around identities that span
the political/ideological divide and are capable of uniting both sides. Explaining how the issue affects the national group, for example, and how taking action is congruent with national interests and values (values that are neither liberal nor conservative) may be one avenue worth exploring.

Limitations and future directions

It should be noted that the participants in both studies predominantly reported a high degree of concern about climate change. Future research should examine whether the pattern of results may vary further for those who are either less concerned or less convinced of the risks associated with climate change. Another factor to consider about the design of these studies was that attitudes towards climate change were measured immediately following exposure to the frame manipulations. One might expect that the impact of such frames would be greatest immediately following exposure, and would fade rapidly over time. It is also possible, however, that the effect would increase with time as participants have the chance to reflect and fully process the messages. Finally, while the design of this research, with individuals exposed to a single frame manipulation in isolation, is appropriate for drawing causal inferences about the effect of the frame, the real-world experience of political communication is one where individuals are exposed to many, often countervailing, messages. Future research should explore the impact of exposure to multiple, competing frames. Similarly, research should look to real-world examples of communication campaigns to establish whether these coincided with measurable shifts in public sentiment.
Conclusion

The present studies demonstrate that the way an issue is framed can influence the group identities people see as relevant to the issue, and the norms that affect their attitudes. Thus, to the extent that political elites can influence the way that issues are framed in public debate, they have considerable power to shape public opinion. However framing can have unintended consequences, doing as much to turn low identifiers away from group norms as attracting high identifiers to them. As such, those who seek to influence public opinion by linking issues to group identities need to consider the nature of the groups they evoke and the relationship between their audience and the group.
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Interaction of religious/spiritual identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of religious/spiritual identification, across control and moral frame condition – Study 1.

Figure 2. Interaction of religious/spiritual identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at lower levels of religious/spiritual identification, across control and moral frame condition – Study 1.

Figure 3. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of class identification, across control and economic frame condition – Study 1.

Figure 4. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at lower levels of class identification, across control and economic frame condition – Study 1.

Figure 5. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at higher levels of political knowledge and lower levels of class identification, across control and political frame condition – Study 2.

Figure 6. Interaction of class identification and perceived norms on climate change attitudes at lower levels of political knowledge and lower levels of class identification, across control and political frame condition – Study 2.

Figure 7. Mediation model for the effect of the political frame on climate change attitudes with perceived relevance to class group and perceived class norms as mediators – Study 2.
Appendix A

**Items measuring climate change attitudes (Study 1)**

1. It is the responsibility of the current generation to preserve the environment for those that follow.

2. If we followed the advice of environmentalists the economy would be ruined.\

3. Australia should take the lead in global efforts to combat the effects of climate change.

4. We all need to be prepared to make sacrifices if we want to avoid environmental catastrophe.

5. The evidence that human activity is responsible for climate change is not very convincing.\

6. We need to take whatever steps are necessary to reduce carbon emissions regardless of the economic costs.

7. We should not take any action that threatens our nation’s economic competitiveness.\

8. Australia should introduce an emissions trading scheme as soon as possible in order to reduce carbon emissions.

9. We should wait to see what other countries are prepared to do before committing to any action on climate change.\

10. We have a moral obligation to protect the environment against the effects of climate change.

**Items measuring group identification (Study 1 & 2)**

1. I have a lot in common with the average [……..] person.

2. I feel solidarity with the [……..].
3. Being [……..] is an important part of how I see myself.

4. I am glad to be [……..].

5. The [……..] have a lot in common with each other.

**Items measuring perceived group norms (Study 1)**

6. A typical member of this group would think that climate change is one of the most urgent threats we face.

7. A typical member of this group would think that we should do whatever is necessary to reduce carbon emissions.

8. A typical member of this group would think that we should not act until we see what other countries are prepared to do.*

**Items measuring climate change attitudes (Study 2)**

1. It is the responsibility of the current generation to preserve the environment for those that follow.

2. There is little doubt that climate change is happening.

3. The evidence that human activity is responsible for climate change is not very convincing.*

4. There is a danger that climate change could lead to environmental catastrophe.

5. We need to take whatever steps are necessary to reduce carbon dioxide emissions regardless of the economic costs.

6. There is too much alarmism about climate change.*

7. Reducing the amount of carbon dioxide humans emit into the atmosphere is vital if we are to combat climate change.

8. We have a moral obligation to protect the environment against the effects of climate change.
Items measuring perceived group norms (Study 2)

1. A typical […….] would believe that climate change is real.

2. A typical […….] would believe that human activity is largely responsible for climate change

3. A typical […….] would consider climate change to be one of the most urgent threats we face.

4. A typical […….] would think that we should do whatever we can to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Items measuring political knowledge (Study 2)

1. David Cameron represents which electorate in the House of Commons?
   a) Sedgefield  b) Huntingdon  c) Finchley  d) Witney  e) Unsure

2. How many MPs are there in the House of Commons?
   a) 230  b) 650  c) 590  d) 430  e) Unsure

3. In what year was Margaret Thatcher first elected Prime Minister?
   a) 1979  b) 1976  c) 1981  d) 1983  e) Unsure

4. What party did Herbert Asquith represent as Prime Minister?
   a) Conservative  b) Labour  c) Liberal Democrat  d) Liberal  e) Unsure
5. Who is the Chancellor of the Exchequer?
   a) William Hague  b) Nick Clegg  c) George Osborne  d) Danny Alexander  e) Unsure

6. Who is the current speaker in the House of Commons?
   a) Lindsay Hoyle  b) Nigel Evans  c) Dawn Primarolo  d) John Bercow  e) Unsure

7. Who is the deputy leader of the Labour Party?
   a) Ed Milliband  b) Harriet Harman  c) Ed Balls  d) Yvette Cooper  e) Unsure

8. Who is the leader of the Liberal Democrats?
   a) Nick Clegg  b) Danny Alexander  c) Vince Cable  d) Michael Moore  e) Unsure

* Indicates reverse scored items.
Appendix B

Responses to item concerning self-identified religious/spiritual group – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual but not religious</td>
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<td>Atheist</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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Responses to item concerning self-identified socio-economic class group – Study 1

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
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<td>Working class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
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<td>2.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Responses to item concerning self-identified religious/spiritual group – Study 2

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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>58.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual but not religious</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atheist</td>
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<td>19.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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Responses to item concerning self-identified socio-economic class group – Study 2

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<tr>
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<td>Middle class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>276</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
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Responses to item concerning self-identified partisan group – Study 2

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<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
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<td>Conservative supporter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labour supporter</td>
<td>60</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Democrat supporter</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter or another party</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not support any political party</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>38.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>276</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix C

Frame manipulations – Study 2

Control condition

Attitudes towards climate change

Moral frame condition

Climate change – the greatest moral challenge of our time

Climate change is one of the most pressing problems we face as a community. There are arguments about how serious the problem is and what should be done about it, but at a deeper level, climate change forces us to confront fundamental moral questions.

There are many who see the natural environment as a sacred gift. They believe we have a particular responsibility to live in harmony with and care for the environment, ensuring God’s creation is preserved for generations to come. From this perspective, an appropriate response to climate change must start with a commitment to sustainability and recognition of the inter-relatedness of all life.

Others, however, see our relationship to the natural world very differently. According to this more secular view, people have dominion over nature and humanity’s interests naturally take precedence over the environment. In this sense, the environment is valuable to the extent that it provides resources to advance people’s material wellbeing.

To help us understand the many varied perspective, in the remainder of the survey, we are interested in your attitudes about climate change and what you perceive to be the views held by others.
Economic frame condition

Climate change – the greatest economic challenge of our time

Climate change is one of the most pressing problems we face as a community. There are arguments about how serious the problem is and what should be done about it, but at a deeper level, climate change forces us to confront fundamental questions about the nature of our economy and society.

Addressing climate change will involve significant changes to our economic and social structure. This may lead to resistance from those at the top of the economic pile who might fear that any change will threaten their relatively privileged position.

However, if we fail to adequately respond to climate change, it may be those hardworking people in the middle and lower end of the social and economic ladder who actually bear the greatest burden.

To help us understand the many varied perspective, in the remainder of the survey, we are interested in your attitudes about climate change and what you perceive to be the views held by others.
Political frame condition

**Climate change – the greatest political challenge of our time**

Climate change is one of the most pressing problems we face as a community. There are arguments about how serious the problem is and what should be done about it, but at a deeper level, climate change forces us to confront fundamental political questions.

Our political system tends to place a great deal of emphasis on the pursuit of individual wealth and autonomy. However, this focus can come at the expense of environmental sustainability.

To address climate change, politicians from all sides have to strike a balance between values of wealth and autonomy, and values of sustainability and fairness in order to serve the common good.

To help us understand the many varied perspective, in the remainder of the survey, we are interested in your attitudes about climate change and what you perceive to be the views held by others.
Chapter 7 - Conclusion

This thesis aimed to extend our understanding of the processes involved in group-based social influence. Drawing on the social identity approach to social influence (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, Turner et al, 1987), this thesis examined the critical role that the perceived relevance of an issue to a group identity plays in group-based social influence. It also investigated whether this process can be influenced by frames designed to affect the way people understand either the issue or the group.

The social identity approach to social influence is based on the notion that we regard people who are similar to ourselves as valid sources of information about reality. We both expect to agree with similar others and are motivated to do so (Turner, 1982; 1991). In line with this theory, research has shown that individuals’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviour are influenced by the groups with which they identify (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 1996; Terry, Hogg & White, 1999). However, evidence from both the social identity (e.g. Smith et al, 2005) and persuasion (e.g. Mackie et al, 1990; Wyer, 2010) literature suggest that this group-based influence is limited to those issues that are perceived to be relevant to the group. This sense of relevance depends upon a degree of congruence between the meaning attached to the group (i.e. what the group stands for, what interests and values it represents) and the meaning associated with the issue (what interests and values are implicated). Where there is congruence or alignment, the attitudes of group members, particularly those highly identified with the group, will tend to reflect group norms. Where this congruence does not exist, where the issue is not perceived to be relevant to the group, there is no compulsion to seek
or reach agreement with other group members; since the issue does not implicate group interests or values, it is only natural for group members to differ.

In many cases it is quite clear which issues are relevant to a particular group identity, or which group identity is relevant to a particular issue. In other cases, however, these judgements are not so clear-cut. There can be a degree of ambiguity in the meanings people attach to both groups and issues. That is, there may be a range of group identities that could be perceived as relevant to a particular issue. The corollary is that to the extent that the norms of these various groups differ on the issue in question, one’s attitude towards the issue could vary considerably depending on which group is perceived to be relevant. As such, anything that affects one’s understanding of the nature of the issue, or of various groups, could have a marked impact on one’s attitude towards the issue.

A great deal of research in the communication and political science literature has demonstrated that the meaning people attach to issues is often highly ambiguous and attitudes can be influenced by issue frames which highlight certain meanings over others (see Chong & Druckman, 2007 for a review). Similarly, research from the social identity tradition indicates that the meaning attached to group identities can vary with shifts in the social context (e.g. Hopkins et al, 1997; Rabinovic et al, 2011). Qualitative research by Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues also suggests that the meaning attached to social groups is susceptible to rhetorical manipulation (see Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Reicher, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010). If the meaning attached to both issues and groups is variable and open to influence, then
manipulating one or other to establish the relevance of an issue to a group identity is a potential strategy for those who seek to influence public opinion.

The current research investigated these processes of social influence through four empirical studies in the context of real-world issues and real-world groups. The first two studies investigated the effect of frames designed to manipulate the perceived relevance of Christian identity to different types of political issues. The final two studies examined the potential to manipulate the perceived relevance of climate change to different social identities. The results of these studies have implications for our understanding of the processes involved in group-based social influence, as well as the research techniques used to investigate them. The results also have implications for the practice of social influence, with lessons for those who would seek to influence attitudes towards important social issues.

**Study 1**

Study 1 investigated the role of religious identification and its influence on attitudes towards different types of issues. Research on the intersection of religion and politics consistently finds a strong relationship between religiosity and conservative political attitudes (Malka, Lelkes, Srivastava, Cohen & Miller, 2012; Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt & Green, 2006; Layman & Green, 2005; Olson & Green, 2006). However, this relationship is largely confined to what are called ‘cultural’ issues (e.g. abortion, gay rights). Based on the premise that this connection is driven at least in part by elite religious and political rhetoric that emphasises the relevance of these types of issues over others, we sought to determine whether simple frames could influence the extent to which religious identity and norms predict attitudes towards different types of issues.
We presented a sample of self-identified Christians from Australia with simple messages about the types of issues that are relevant to their Christian faith. In one condition, we emphasised the relevance of cultural issues, in another we emphasised the relevance of civic issues (i.e. welfare, climate change, asylum seekers). We also included a control condition in order to capture the underlying position based on participants’ understanding of their religious faith and the types of issues relevant to it. In line with previous research, we found that those who reported higher levels of Christian identification were more likely to hold conservative attitudes towards cultural issues, but that this connection did not extend to civic issues. The fact that the relationship between Christian identification and conservative attitudes was confined to the types of issues commonly framed in religious terms in public discourse supports the notion that elite rhetoric does indeed inform the way people understand their religious identity and its relevance to political issues.

We also found that the frame highlighting the relevance of Christian identity to both moral and civic issues produced normative influence on attitudes towards climate change. However, this was the only instance where the frame manipulation had an effect. The absence of any impact of messages highlighting the relevance of cultural issues to the Christian faith may have been because participants are regularly exposed to similar messages outside the lab. However, the fact that the frame manipulations had no effect on the relationship between Christian norms and attitudes towards other civic issues suggested that a more elaborate type of message may be required to readily alter the way people understand the relationship between their faith and political issues.
Study 2

Study 2 built in the findings of Study 1, again in the context of Christian identity, but with a sample from the United Kingdom. In this study, we examined the effect of more elaborate messages designed to influence the types of core values that people associate with their faith and their religious group. In one condition, we presented participants with a message that framed Christian identity in terms of family values, in another in terms of social justice values. Again, we included a control condition to capture the underlying sense in which participants understand their religious faith and its connection to various issues.

As in Study 1, we found that Christian identification was strongly associated with conservative attitudes towards cultural issues, but not civic issues. We found that the frames had a more pronounced impact on the connection between religious identification, norms and political attitudes than was the case in Study 1. Defining Christian identity in terms of family values either precipitated or accentuated the influence of Christian norms on attitudes towards euthanasia and abortion, respectively, among high identifiers. The family values frame also led to normative influence on attitudes towards welfare among high Christian identifiers, and undermined normative influence among low identifiers. This finding was notable in two respects: first, it suggested that the family values frame led participants to see welfare (an ostensibly civic issue) as relevant to their religious identity, and secondly, the frame had a contrary impact among low identifiers (undermining normative influence) to that among high identifiers.

The social justice frame also had significant effects, undermining the extent to which Christian norms predicted attitudes towards abortion. This suggests that framing religious identity in a way that emphasised the relevance of
civic issues had the effect of undermining the perceived relevance of cultural issues. The social justice frame also undermined normative influence on attitudes towards climate change among low identifiers, again showing that the effect of establishing the relevance of an identity to an issue can be moderated by the level of group identification.

**Study 3**

Whereas Studies 1 and 2 examined the effect of framing group identity, Study 3 looked at the effect of framing an issue, and shifted the focus to specifically examine attitudes to climate change. Working with an Australian sample, we examined whether the effect of issue frames commonly found in public debate about climate change had an effect on the extent to which different group identities and norms predicted attitudes. In one condition, climate change was framed as a moral issue, in another condition as an economic issue. As with earlier studies, we included a control condition in which the issue was not framed in any particular way in order to capture participants’ underlying understanding of the issue.

We found that the norms of both religious/spiritual group and class group were positively related to attitudes towards climate change among those highly identified with the group. The relationship between class group norms and climate change attitudes was only evident among high identifiers exposed to the economic frame, suggesting that the frame was successful in establishing the relevance of the issue to the group. The relationship between norms and attitudes among those highly identified with their religious/spiritual group was evident in both the control condition and the moral frame condition, indicating that high
identifiers saw the group as relevant to the issue regardless of framing, and the moral frame served to reinforce rather than enhance this impression.

The results for low identifiers were somewhat similar to those found in Study 2. The moral frame worked to undermine relationship between group norms and attitudes among low religious/spiritual group identifiers, while the economic frame produced a negative relationship between class group norms and attitudes among low class identifiers. The results among low identified group members suggest that the frame established a link between the issue and the group. We speculate that the fact that this link eliminated the relationship between group norms and attitudes among low religious/spiritual group identifiers while producing a reactance against group norms among low class identifiers was due to the different nature of these identities and the resulting valence associated with low identification.

**Study 4**

Study 4 built on the findings of Study 3, again in the context of attitudes towards climate change, but with a sample from the United Kingdom. Once again, climate change was framed in different ways across conditions, but in this study more elaborate frame manipulations were employed to influence the types of values associated with the issue. Given the considerable evidence that attitudes towards climate change have become increasingly politicised in recent times (Kahan et al, 2012; Kahan, 2013), a political frame condition was included in the study design, as were measures of partisan identification and norms. Again, we included a control condition without any explicit frame. Study 4 also included a measure of political knowledge to test whether the effect of framing was greater among those who were more engaged with politics (Slothuus, 2008; Slothuus &
de Vreese, 2010), and we directly measured the extent to which participants regarded climate change as relevant to their religious/spiritual, class and partisan groups in order to test whether changes in perceived relevance mediated the effect of the frames.

The results of Study 4 largely replicate and extend those of Study 3. As in Study 3, group norms predicted attitudes towards climate change. As in Study 3, class norms had no effect on climate change attitudes in the control condition, but framing (in this case the political frame) appeared to establish a link between class identity and the issue, leading high identifiers to report attitudes in line with their perception of group norms, while low identifiers reported attitudes polarized away from group norms. Study 4 extended these results by showing that this effect of the political frame was limited to those with higher levels of political knowledge. In this sense, the results accord with evidence from previous research on framing (Slothuus, 2008, Slothuus & de Vresse, 2010). Furthermore, mediation analysis indicated that there was an indirect effect of the political frame. The political frame led participants to perceive climate change to be more relevant to their class group, which in turn increased the perceived normative concern about the issue, which was reflected in participants’ attitudes. These results indicate that framing can influence attitudes by establishing the relevance of a particular group identity to the issue, and that framing can lead individual’s attitudes to become a reflection of the group norms and their relationship to the group.

**Overall findings**

Taken as a whole, there are a number of themes that emerge from the findings of these four studies. I will discuss each of the main themes in turn.
Group-based social influence

Across the studies, the results were consistent with the standard group-based social influence pattern (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 1996). In each of the studies, we found that participant attitudes were in line with the norms of groups with which they identified. Often this was exclusively or at least particularly the case for those who strongly identified with the group. In many cases, this pattern was evident in the control condition of the studies – i.e. in the absence of explicit framing. This reflects the fact that participants did not come to the studies as blank slates; they came with existing understandings of the issues and the groups involved, which informed their judgements of the relevance of specific group identities to specific issues. These understandings and this evidence of the underlying perceptions of the relevance of particular groups to issues (and vice versa) presumably reflect frames that participants have encountered in their private interactions and public discourse.

The impact of frames

The results indicate that the process of group-based social influence can be manipulated by rhetorical frames designed to shift participants’ understanding of the nature of the group or the meaning of the issue. In some cases the frame either produced or accentuated the impact of group norms. In others, the frame appeared to have the effect of undermining normative influence, and in some cases actually led to counter-normative influence. These results are consistent with the notion that the frames established the relevance of the issue to the group identity (or vice versa) by creating an alignment between recipients’ understanding of the content of the identity and the social meaning of the issue.
And in the final study (Study 4), relevance was explicitly measured to demonstrate its role in mediating the effect of the frame.

The moderating effect of the level and nature of group identification

While frames tended to produce or accentuate the relationship between group norms and attitudes among those who were strongly identified with the group, the results were very different for those with low levels of identification. In a number of cases, frames that established the relevance of an issue to a group had the effect of undermining a certain level of normative influence among low identifiers. That is, those who might otherwise have reported attitudes in line with group norms tended to disregard group norms when the frame made the connection explicit. In other cases, though, the frames led low identifiers to report attitudes that were polarized away from group norms. This polarization occurred only among those with low levels of class identification and was not evident for the other group identities explored across the studies (i.e. Christian identity, religious/spiritual identity or partisan identity). This may reflect a particular feature of class identity (e.g. being largely externally constrained rather than freely adopted) that does not apply to the other identities explored in these studies.

The effect of the frames interacts with participants’ understanding of groups and issues

Viewing the results across the studies we can conclude that the effect of the frames is neither uniform nor readily predictable. In many cases the frames had no impact on participants’ attitudes, or the extent to which they were predicted by group identification or norms. This could suggest either of the following:
That the frame simply reflected participants’ existing understanding of the issue and/or group; or

That participants did not accept the frame because it proposed a notion of group or issue meaning that was outside the bounds of their understanding and they simply did not find the frame compelling or convincing enough to adjust their understanding.

We also found that the frames produced results that were unexpected. For example, while we anticipated that framing Christian identity in terms of social justice values would enhance the perceived relevance of welfare to the group, the results in Study 2 suggest that it was the family values frame that had this effect. In other words, participants interpreted the family values frame in a way that led them to see the issue of welfare through the lens of their Christian identity. While this is explicable in retrospect, it is not something we had anticipated. Similarly, while we expected that a message framing climate change in economic terms would prompt participants to view the issue through the lens of their class identity (as in Study 3), what we found in Study 4 was that it was the political frame that has this effect.

Considering the range of results, including the instances where the frames produced no discernible effect, highlights the fact that the frames interact with the perceptions and understandings that participants bring to them; that people actively interpret the frames they encounter, rather than passively accepting them. It suggests that those existing understandings will both constrain the range of frames that will be successful in influencing attitudes through the social influence processes outlined, and, in some cases, produce effects that are difficult to anticipate. These findings therefore indicate that those who employ framing to
shape public opinion should develop and refine their messages on the basis of a thorough understanding of the existing understandings people bring to the consideration of issues and groups.

**Implications**

*Group-based social influence*

The findings of these studies support the general applicability of the social identity approach to the study of social influence (Turner, 1982; 1991; Turner, et al, 1987). Across each of the four studies we found the classic pattern of group-based social influence evident in previous research (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 1996, Terry, Hogg & White, 1999; Smith & Terry, 2003; Louis, Davies, Smith & Terry, 2007; Smith, Terry & Hogg, 2007; White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade & McKimmie, 2009), with group norms predicting attitudes particularly for those highly identified with the group.

The results also contribute to our understanding of the critical role of perceived *relevance* in group-based social influence. As with previous research (Smith et al, 2005; Mackie et al 1990; Wyer, 2010), these studies indicate that social influence is in large part dependent on the perceived relevance of the issue to the group. Even in contexts in which the design of the experiment all but assured the salience of a particular identity (e.g. Christian identity in Studies 1 and 2), we found that group norms predicted attitudes to some issues but not others. In some cases, the extent to which group norms predicted attitudes was significantly affected by exposure to a frame that highlighted the relevance of the issue to the group (or vice versa). This critical role of perceived relevance was further confirmed by the results of Study 4, in which the effect of the frame on
attitudes was partly mediated by an increase in the perceived relevance of the issue to that specific group identity.

These findings go beyond previous work in this area by demonstrating that perceptions of relevance are malleable and can be influenced by relatively simple messages about the nature of the group or the issue. In so doing, this research indicates that influencing perceived relevance in this way has the potential to produce persuasion and attitude change through a process of group-based social influence.

These findings also contribute to the understanding of group-based social influence as a rational, considered process, rather than one based on mindless conformity. The results of Studies 3 and 4, for example, suggest that the effect of framing was apparent among those with higher levels of political knowledge: those with both the motivation and the ability to interpret the frame, and assimilate it with the meanings associated with the issue and the group. This accords with previous research demonstrating that the interpretation of information about group norms and their relevance to specific issues is moderated by political engagement or knowledge (e.g. Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010; Malka et al, 2012). Furthermore, the fact that only some of the frames produced normative influence also indicates that participants actively interpret them, discriminating between those that did establish the alignment of the group and issue meaning, and those that did not. If the frames had worked on the basis of a simple priming effect, we would have expected more uniform results. Finally, the fact that framing produced polarization away from group norms among low class identifiers in Studies 3 and 4 also suggests that the issue was actively considered in light of the meaning associated with the group. All of these findings are at odds
with the cognitive miser view of group cognition; the notion that reference to group norms and group understandings reflects the absence of considered, rational cognition.

The findings relating to low group identifiers also have implications for our understanding of the processes involved in group-based social influence. The fact that linking an issue to particular groups can lead low identifiers to repudiate group norms suggests that the process of group-based social influence is not only relevant to high identifiers (see Terry & Hogg, 1996; Terry et al., 1999). Group-based social influence could be seen as a symmetrical process of attraction to, and repulsion from, referent group norms, depending on the perceived relevance of the group, the level of identification, and the meaning associated with the group. Taken together with previous research showing that people react against positions espoused by outgroup sources (e.g. Mackie & Queller, 2000; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010), the current results suggest that, at least in some cases, people will also react against the position of ingroups. In effect, the nominal ingroup appeared to be a negative referent group. In each case participants were not pre-allocated to particular groups but had the opportunity to choose the group label (from a range of categories in a given domain) that they felt best described themselves. That said, simply indicating that a particular group label applies to oneself is not to say that the group is an important, nor, for that matter, a particularly welcome, aspect of the self-concept. This may be particularly the case for class categories, where participants may have picked labels that represent externally imposed constraints rather than choice.
An alternative explanation may be that low identifiers who were nominally part of the group may have actually re-defined themselves as ‘other’ on the basis of a different categorization. This seems unlikely, however, at least in Study 4, given that the impact of the political frame was mediated by an increase in the relevance of the issue to the class group. That is, the negative association between class group norms and attitudes towards climate change found in Study 4 was dependent upon those exposed to the political frame perceiving greater relevance of climate change to the class group than those in the control condition. If the negative impact of class norms were simply an artifact, the product of an alternative identification, we would expect to see a decline in perceived relevance of the issue to the class group.

Practically speaking, these results suggest that it may be useful for researchers to capture the meaning attached to an ingroup identity (i.e. the extent to which they are embraced or rejected), in addition to distinguishing between ingroups and outgroups. The results also highlight the benefits of measuring the level of group identification, even in studies where identity salience is manipulated. While many studies assume that an ingroup will be self-defining when made salient, this may not be the case for low identifiers. Participants may report that they are a member of a group (e.g. social class, university), but not identify strongly with the group even when it is made salient. The results of these studies suggest that the effect of salience manipulations can be very different depending on the level of identification and the meaning or valence associated with the group.
The strategic construction of identity

The results of these studies offer an effective empirical demonstration of *identity entrepreneurship* to complement the work of Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 1996a; Reicher & Hopkins, 1996b; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Reicher, 2004; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2010) examining the strategic construction of identity inherent in much political rhetoric. More specifically, the current research demonstrates that even fairly simple messages about either an issue or a group can affect the way social identities are used to give meaning to issues, and the extent to which the associated group norms will influence attitudes. The findings also point to the limits and the pitfalls of this strategy of social influence. Namely, the findings suggest that those who receive such messages will interpret them in light of their existing understanding of the groups and issues involved, and will only be persuaded by those messages that make a compelling case for the alignment between the two. Equally, the understandings people bring to these messages may produce quite different effects to those expected. They can, for example, lead people to repudiate the exact norms they might be intended to embrace. As such, those who seek to manipulate the meanings people attach to issues and groups in order to influence public opinion need to start from a solid understanding of the existing meanings, and the bounds of ambiguity. That is, much like the latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment in Sherif and Hovland’s (1961) study of attitudes, they should understand the range of meanings that their audience will accept about the group and the issues, and work to find areas of potential overlap or alignment.
The results are also consistent with the interdependent understanding of the relationship between social categories and social reality proposed by Reicher, Hopkins and colleagues (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Kahani-Hopkins & Hopkins, 2002; Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Reicher, 2004). The findings indicate that the rhetoric used to define an issue or a group can have a considerable impact on how the issue or group is understood. To the extent that these understandings and resulting attitudes influence behaviour, they are likely to shape the social context in which those issues and groups are discussed, contested and acted upon in the future. Few would dispute, for example, that the emergence of a conservative, politicised strand of religious activism in the form of the Religious Rights has had a profound impact on US politics and policy in recent decades. Equally, the promulgation of a more progressive form of religious identity could help mobilise a constituency in support of a more liberal policy agenda.

**Issue framing**

In demonstrating the importance of group processes and the broader social context in which attitudes are formed and influenced (see Hogg & Smith, 2007), the current research also has implications for our understanding issue framing. The findings support Nelson and Kinder’s (1996) assertion that group-centrism plays a significant role in public opinion and can vary according to how issues are framed. However, the results take this one step further by highlighting the role that social identity processes play in this group-centrism. That is, by influencing the meaning people attach to an issue, frames can affect which social identity is perceived as relevant and which group norms therefore come to guide attitudes. This is compatible with the traditional understanding of attitudes based on
expectancy value models (see Azjen & Fishbein, 1980). However, it also extends this understanding by suggesting that frames not only influence the range or relative weight of considerations that bear on individuals’ attitudes, they can also influence how people see themselves in relation to the issue, and how this impacts on their understanding of the issue as well as the groups that are relevant to it. As such, these findings complement previous research in the area (Price, 1989), and indicate that frames need not refer explicitly to groups or group conflict in order to establish the relevance of groups to an issue. Even subtle frames that merely allude to the types of interests and values associated with group identities can lead recipients to view the issue through the prism of group identity.

*Applying the social identity perspective to the study of religion*

This research also contributes to the growing body of literature demonstrating the value of the social identity perspective in the study of religion and its connection to topics as diverse as fundamentalism (Herriot, 2007), prejudice (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999), intergroup conflict (Cairns et al, 2006; Verkuyten, 2007), and mental health (Koteskey, Little & Matthews, 1991; Ysseldyk, Mattheson & Anisman, 2009). This research makes a vital advance by experimentally applying the social identity model of influence to the connection between religion and political attitudes. In doing so, this research contributes to the debate about whether the association between religiosity and conservative political attitudes results from a natural confluence of underlying values and ideological proclivities (e.g. Alford, Funk & Hibbing, 2005; Graham, Haidt & Nosek, 2009; Jost, Nosek & Gosling, 2008), or from a social context dominated by the discourse of religious conservatism (Malka et al, 2012; Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt & Poloma, 1997; Layman & Green, 2005). While the findings of
the current research do not preclude an organic association, they do indicate that
discourse highlighting the relevance of different types of issues to Christian
identity can influence the meaning people ascribe to their religious identity and its
relevance to various issues. As such, it suggests that the connection between
religion and political attitudes is to some degree contingent on the social
environment, and thus there is the possibility for the connection to change over
time as that environment changes. Indeed, it suggests that there is scope for those
with a more progressive understanding of the connection between religion and
politics to promulgate this understanding and create a constituency around it.

**Applying the social identity perspective to climate change**

In a similar vein, this research also supports the role that groups and
group-based social influence play in attitudes towards climate change and the
importance of extending our understanding of these effects (American
Psychological Association, 2009). The results accord with work by Kahan and
colleagues (Kahan et al, 2012; Kahan, 2013; Kahan, 2015) to the effect that
individuals’ attitudes towards climate change can be seen in part as an expression
of their identification with, and loyalty to, particular groups for whom the issue
has taken on a certain symbolic resonance (see also Bliuc et al, 2015). The current
findings have a number of implications for this line of research. First, they offer
an insight into how issues can come to develop this symbolic meaning for
political or ideological groups. They indicate, for example, that the public
discourse around the issue may serve to establish and reinforce the association
between the liberal/conservative divide and positions on the issue.

In demonstrating how these associations can be made, this research
suggests that there may not be anything natural or inevitable about the connection
between ideological conservatism and scepticism about the risks of climate change. Indeed, to the extent that this connection, such that it exists, is the product of a particular public discourse, this research suggests that challenging that discourse can alter the meaning associated with the issue thereby promoting a more open and collaborative approach to weighing the risks and possible responses.

*Challenging the status quo*

While this research suggests that the meanings attached to group identities such as Christianity and important public issues like climate change are susceptible to social influence, a word of caution is warranted. While communication on any scale has the potential to influence the meaning people attach to groups and issues, in many cases it is mass communication through media and large networks of people that lead to a significant change in public opinion. As such, those with the power and the resources to access those communication channels are at a natural advantage in shaping public opinion. This creates a bias towards the status quo in society, or, at least, a bias in favour of change that serves the interests of those with power and influence. That said, recent developments in communication and social media do open up possibilities for small groups of committed people to communicate and reach larger audiences than has previously been possible. Furthermore, while this research indicates that the meaning people attach to groups and to issues is open to influence, it also suggests that there are limits – latitudes of rejection – and it is not simply a case of anything goes. While there may be a bias in favour of the loudest voice, there is also a bias in favour of the most compelling voice.
In bringing together the largely disparate theoretical perspectives of social identity and issue framing, this research also points towards other avenues for interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation. The insights from the current research, for example, may be of relevance to sociologists involved in framing research. The framing perspective in sociology was sparked by a seminal paper (Snow, Rochford, Worden & Benford, 1986) which examined the factors that lead people to become involved in collective action via social movement organisations, and in particular the role the framing plays in this process. They define a frame as a “schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (p. 464), and argue that frame alignment or “the linking of individual and social movement organisation (SMO) interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complementary” (p. 464), is a necessary condition for participation in collective action. Furthermore, they outline four types of frame alignment processes:

- **Frame building** – linking two or more ideologically congruent by structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem.

- **Frame amplification** – the clarification and amplification of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events, either through elevating a particular value or belief that might motivate participation.

- **Frame extension** – extending the boundaries of a movements’ objectives to those that may be salient to potential participants.
• Frame transformation – presenting a new interpretive prism that characterises a specific domain or life, or every aspect of life, as problematic or unjust.

While the concept of a frame as conceived in this sociological literature is perhaps more broad than that used in the current research, the potential relevance is based on more than simply terminological similarity. The concept of social identity and more specifically, identity content, provides a conceptual framework around which to understand the meaning ascribed to social movements. Indeed, another way to think about SMOs is as identity groups, where the identity content is based on shared interests or values along with a commitment to take action to address a perceived violation of those interests of values (see Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele’s, 2007 work on opinion-based groups as a predictor of commitment to collective action).

Related work within the social identity tradition also provides a detailed, empirical analysis of the factors that promote collective action. Analysis by Thomas and colleague (Thomas et al, 2009a, Thomas et al, 2009b), for example, suggests that sustained commitment to collective action to bring about social change is best facilitated by aligning social identity with congruent norms for action, emotions (e.g. moral outrage), and beliefs regarding efficacy (see also work by van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008). To some degree, this was addressed by Snow and colleagues (1986) in their concept of belief amplification, where they identified beliefs about the potential efficacy of taking collective action as a key element to be brought into alignment through frame amplification. However, Thomas and colleagues provide a more systematic and practical
analysis in suggesting that the motivating force of this belief can be maximized when aligned with identity and emotion.

The current research offers some guidance to the sociological work on ‘frame extension’ by showing how rhetorical messages can be used to connect a new issue to a SMO. As the empirical studies outlined in the pages above indicate, this can be achieved either through framing a specific group (e.g. a SMO) in a way that aligns with the social meaning of a previously unconnected issue, or by framing the issue in a way that aligns with the content of a previously unconnected group. These same rhetorical strategies could also be employed to promote the alignment of norms, emotions and beliefs Thomas and colleagues identify within the content of an identity group.

Finally, the findings outlined above also offer some insights on the question of frame resonance, an issue that has been the focus of much research within the sociological literature on framing. Snow and Benford (1988), for example pose the question, “under what conditions do framing efforts strike a responsive chord or resonate with the targets of mobilization? What are the key determinants of the differential success or movement framing efforts? What, in short, accounts for what might be termed frame resonance?” (pp. 198-199). While these and other sociological researchers offer a range of answers to this question, the current research suggests that efforts to achieve frame extension, at least, will resonate to the extent that they forge a perceived alignment of the meaning or content of a group identity with the social meaning of the issue. As is noted above, this places an onus on those doing the framing to come armed with a solid understanding of the existing meanings their intended audience attach to the
group and issues and the bounds of potentially accepted meanings to ensure they
craft frames that are pitched where there is most room for alignment.

**Future directions**

The current series of studies highlight the critical role that the perceived
relevance of an issue to a group plays in group-based social influence. The results
indicate that perceptions of relevance can be manipulated by simple messages
about the nature of groups or of issues. Both the theoretical and practical
implications of these findings have been canvassed. To conclude, it is useful to
consider how these ideas might be further developed to provide greater insights
into the processes of social influence and the effect of public discourse.

**Mediating processes**

The current research was based on the notion that perceptions of relevance
rely on some degree of congruence or alignment in the meaning attached to the
group and to the issue. While the results of the studies are consistent with this
notion, and indeed indicate that frames can work to enhance perceived relevance,
further work is required to fully clarify the factors that mediate group-based social
influence. For instance, future research could examine the meaning associated
with both issues and groups, and determine the effect that persuasive messages
have on them, and on the alignment of the two. Research in the field of issue
framing (e.g. Slothuus, 2008) has investigated the effect of frames on both the
range of considerations people associate with an issue as well as the relative
importance of those considerations. Likewise, research in the field of social
identity has examined how the content ascribed to group identities is affected by
changes in the frame of reference (e.g. Hopkins et al, 1997; Rabinovic et al,
2012). Future research should seek to measure both of these elements in order to
determine how shifts in meaning ascribed to both issues and groups mediate group-based influence and attitudes change.

This also points to opportunities for research that develops a more nuanced understanding of the meanings associated with both issues and with groups. Future research should build on the framing studies that investigate the range of considerations associated with issues by applying similar measures to ascertain the range of meanings associated with groups. Such research may reveal that, like attitudes, the meaning people ascribe to both issues and groups are characterised by latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment. Such research would offer insights into the potential areas of overlap, and therefore the types of messages that would be likely to enhance perceptions of relevance.

**Manipulating both issue and group meaning**

The studies conducted in this research sought to influence the meaning associated with either a specific group (Christians - Studies 1 and 2) or a specific issue (Climate change – Studies 3 and 4). While the results indicate that each of these was successful in establishing the relevance of the group to the issue (or vice versa), logic suggests that there would be a higher degree of success if both group and issue meaning were manipulated in a single frame. Future research should test this assumption.

**Enhancing external validity**

The frame manipulations included in these studies were designed to reflect the types of messages that are a common feature of public discourse. In this sense, the effects found can be said to have a certain degree of external validity. However, these studies did not fully reflect many of the features of the
communication environment people face when receiving and responding to frames outside the lab. Future research should consider ways to include some of these features in the design of experimental studies. For example, while the current studies examined the effect of exposure to a single frame manipulation, the discourse surrounding any issue that is a matter of public dispute (and indeed many that are not) will include a range of competing frames. This raises a number of interesting questions to be explored in future research, including: whether competing frames cancel each other out; whether competing frames interact to produce unanticipated effects; whether one particular frame will resonate over others, and, if so, what characteristics distinguish those that are effective. While many of these points have been addressed in the issue framing literature (Sniderman & Theriault, 2004; Druckman, 2004), the approach developed here based on the context of group-based frames and group-based social influence processes would be a valuable addition to that literature.

Just as the meaning individuals attach to issues and to groups is influenced by the social context and the groups to which people belong, we would expect that the way messages about those groups and issues are interpreted will be affected by social influence processes. Research by Druckman and Nelson (2003) suggests that the effect of issue frames can be nullified by interpersonal conversations that raise alternative frames. Again, however, it would be interesting to explore these phenomena while also taking account of the group-based features of interpersonal communication. Having participants discuss the meaning of group identity and issues in small interactive groups (see Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas, McGarty & Mavor, 2009; Postmes, Haslam & Swaab, 2005; Postmes, Spears, Lee & Novak, 2005) following exposure to frames could
shed light on the role that dynamic social reinforcement plays in moderating framing effects.

The frame manipulations featured in the current series of studies were not attributed to any particular source. Previous research (Mackie et al, 1990; Mackie et al, 1992) suggests that messages from ingroup sources are likely to be more effective than others. As such, the results of the current studies may well underestimate the potential effect of frames. Future research should examine whether messages designed to establish the relevance of particular issues to the ingroup are more effective if they are attributed to an ingroup source. Similarly, the role of source prototypicality should also be explored.

**Conclusion**

Public discourse about contentious issues is often characterised by disputes over how the issues are understood, and the types of groups that are relevant to them. While previous research has explored the effect of different frames about the nature of issues and rhetoric about the nature of groups, there has been limited integration of the insights from these two literatures. This research has aimed to bridge this gap, to contribute to our understanding of the social influence processes that are commonly at play in public debate and how rhetoric about issues and about social groups might influence public opinion.

In four experimental studies, we explored how messages about the nature of groups and issues can influence the extent to which individuals perceive issues through the prism of particular group memberships. We found that such frames produced or enhanced group-based normative influence in some cases, while in others it led individuals who were not highly identified with the group to react against group norms. The results also indicated that perceptions about the
relevance of the issue to the group partly mediated the effect of the frame. These findings support the application of the social identity perspective to the investigation of issue framing and pave the way for further integration of the social identity perspective on group-based social influence with the literature on public opinion and communication. By shedding additional light on some of the processes through which rhetoric can influence public opinion, these findings offer some guidance for those who seek to engage in public debate. However, these findings also offer insights for those members of the so-called ‘reality-based community’ who seek not only to study but also to challenge powerful forces as they attempt to create new realities.
References


intergroup relations as mediated by social change and frame of reference.


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