

Compassion in Red and Blue: The Politics of Who Cares about Whom

By

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For Cathy and Mike

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CHAPTER I

WHY COMPASSION MATTERS FOR UNDERSTANDING POLITICS

Politics has been famously defined as who gets what, when, and how (Laswell 1936). This allocation of resources is arguably the central struggle in a democratic society. Individuals and groups have different needs and circumstances, and these differences often color their perceptions of what policies are best for the nation as a whole. Some suggest that a primary driver of preferences is material self or group interest (Downs 1957; Tullock 1976; Weeden and Kurzban 2014).¹ Others argue that symbolic attitudes, such as ideology and partisanship, are even more powerful drivers of preferences (Sears et. al 1980). Yet citizens' political preferences are also informed by their concern for the common good, even when certain government resources and laws may not benefit them or their group (Funk 2000).

My research focuses on this last component. I find that concern for others in need in society exerts a separate and, at times, larger influence on political preferences than partisan identity, ideology, or other group memberships. In the following pages I outline that a dispositional concern for others in need—what I term *compassion*—is important to understanding policy preferences on a range of issues, with elite discussion of politics key to understanding the pattern and extent of its importance. By using compassion as a tool, the parties diverge in their propensity to activate or suppress compassion's connection to politics among the public.

When hearing the words, “compassion” and “politics” together, party

¹ Even Downs, however, allowed that, “men are not always selfish, even in politics” (1957, 28).

stereotypes might come to mind, and for good reason. In 2013, a NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* survey revealed that over twice as many Americans believe the Democratic Party does a better job than the Republican Party at showing compassion and concern for people.² An analysis of open-ended comments about the parties from 1978- 2004 provides further evidence that the electorate associates the Democratic Party much more with compassion than the Republican Party (American National Election Study). This, “compassion gap” between the parties has received a great deal of media attention (e.g. Enten 2015; Todd et al. 2014; Lawrence 2013; McElwee 2013; Walsh 2012). It would be easy to conclude that Democrats are the party of compassion while Republicans are not.

In addition, partisans in the electorate diverge when it comes to the amount of compassion they express for certain groups. Consider the results in Figure 1. Multiple surveys ask respondents to rate how much concern or compassion they have regarding certain issues and groups.³ Large majorities of Democrats say it is important to have compassion for groups such as the homeless, immigrants, and civilian casualties of the Iraq War. Republicans are much less likely to say compassion is important in these instances. Almost 61 percent of Democrats report having a lot of compassion for the homeless, while only 34 percent of Republicans do. There is an even wider partisan split of 44 percentage points when the group is described as, “those in need.” Regarding immigration policy, 87 percent of Democrats say they are somewhat or very sympathetic toward undocumented immigrants and their families, compared to 60

² 17 percent of respondents said the Republican Party did a better job, compared to 45 percent saying the Democratic Party.

³ Appendix A provides the full question wording of each survey question.

percent of Republicans. Finally, just 40 percent of Republicans report feeling, “personally upset” about civilian casualties in the Iraq War, compared to 77 percent of Democrats.

FIGURE 1 Compassion for Certain Groups, Percentages

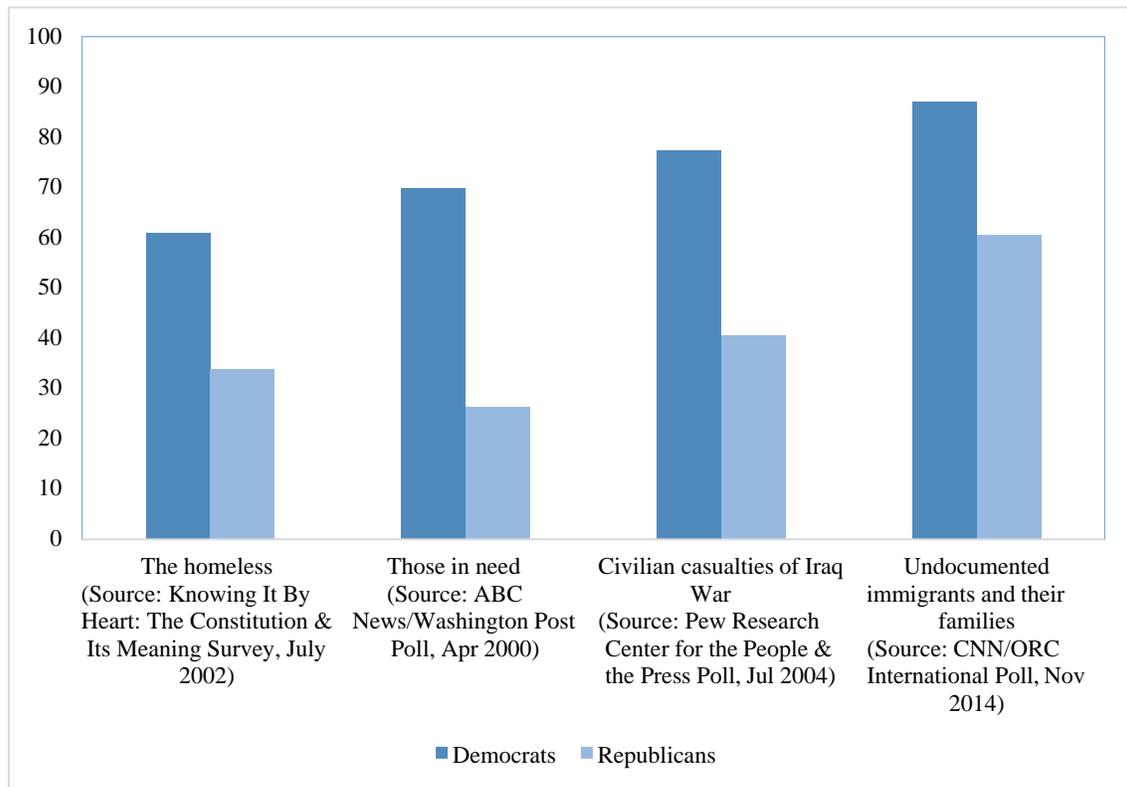


Table 1 also details how party identifiers view the importance of compassion in political leaders. Democrats are consistently 10 or more percentage points higher than Republicans in ranking how important compassion is in a leader or a candidate for president.

TABLE 1 Importance of Compassion in Political Leaders

Percentages	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion is very or extremely important in a candidate for president (Source: AP/GfK Knowledge Networks Poll, Mar 2016)	78	61

Compassion in a leader is very important or absolutely essential (Pew 2008 poll)	78	68
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Such distributions are consistent with the conventional perception that Democrats are more compassionate toward others while Republicans are more self-interested (e.g. Mankiw 2015). Yet, do these patterns indicate differences in dispositional compassion between Republicans and Democrats, that is, that Republicans are less compassionate people by nature than Democrats? Or, do they instead reflect a partisan division in talking about issues for which compassion might be important? If the first is true, then compassion would be an area where partisans are simply different, leading to partisan divisions for anything compassion might pertain to. If, however, the second is true, greater consensus could emerge around such issues in the electorate when compassion is made relevant by both parties.

I uncover that Republican and Democratic Americans do not in fact differ in their general levels of compassion. Rather, it is the connection they make between compassion and politics that differs across party lines. I find that Democrats' compassion guides their attitudes regarding more groups and under more complex circumstances than Republicans. Yet there are important instances for which compassion is more important in informing the opinions of Republicans than it is for Democrats, namely on the issue of abortion.

I propose a theory that compassion must be *connected* to politics to have an influence on public opinion. I argue that the parties define political problems in certain ways to emphasize or reduce the use of compassion by the electorate for specific groups or issues.⁴ Through an analysis of a large scale survey and a sequence of experiments, I

⁴ Another way compassion might be connected to politics is through ideology. Yet I find that ideology

investigate how citizens respond to compassionate rhetoric to inform their political views and behaviors. In addition, I find that differences in the characteristics of groups in need constrain how much the parties are able to redefine problems in compassionate terms, and that these different characteristics influence how effective appeals to compassion are in influencing public opinion.

In my exploration of elite discourse, I show that political elites often talk about compassion. Politicians frequently make moving speeches highlighting their concern for others in need, such as the poor, the elderly, targets of discrimination, victims of violence, or the unborn. Yet they classify differently who is in need of help, and they differ in how likely they are to appeal to compassion for certain issues. Namely, Democratic Party elites are more likely to appeal to compassion than elites of the Republican Party, and they are more likely to classify more groups as deserving of compassion. My research suggests that politics can affect the connection of compassion to mass partisans' political behavior by messages that highlight or downplay the importance of compassion.

My theory builds upon recent work in psychology showing that compassion is something that is universally experienced by human beings (Keltner et al. 2010). It may not be surprising, then, that I find that partisans in the public are similarly concerned about other people. Instead, it is the way caring predispositions are connected to politics that differs. The fact that partisans are equally prone to experiencing compassion also shows it might be a path to overcoming polarization.

cannot explain the separate and often large role that compassion plays in structuring political preferences. On average, liberals and conservatives do not differ in their orientations toward compassion. Orientations toward compassion only appear to differ between extreme liberals and extreme conservatives.

In order to understand the influence of compassion in politics, it is necessary to first define the concept and explain what attitudes and behaviors it leads to. I then turn to research demonstrating that compassion is a powerful and innate human experience that ought to be important to the study of any human behavior, including political behavior. Next, I distinguish compassion from other related concepts studied in the social sciences, including empathy, altruism, pity, and humanitarianism. I then introduce the items used to measure compassion in individuals. Using these measures, I illustrate the distribution and averages of compassion among party identifiers and other social groups. Finally, I map out my theory of how elites connect compassion to politics and what conditions are required to make compassion important to informing people's political preferences.

What Compassion Is

Researchers have begun to explore the influence of personality traits and emotions on politics (e.g. Gerber et al. 2011; Groenendyk 2011; Marcus 2000), but the political influence of concern for others has been largely overlooked. This has left us knowing little about how compassion influences public opinion and political activism. It has also left out a crucial factor in understanding the increasing division between partisans in the electorate.

I adopt the standard definition established throughout the psychology literature. Compassion is defined as: *Concern for others in need and a desire to see their welfare improved* (Batson 2011; Goetz et al. 2010; Nussbaum 1996; Keltner et al. 2010).⁵ Put

⁵ Compassion is the same as the term "empathic concern," used most prominently by the psychologist Daniel Batson. I use the term compassion because it is less jargony than empathic concern, particularly

another way, compassion is “being moved by another’s suffering” (Lazarus 1991). Specifically, it is evoked by the perception of another’s suffering (Haidt 2003), and the action or attitude it prompts is a desire to help or alleviate it (e.g. Batson 2011). In addition, compassion entails feeling concerned for others while also fully valuing them (Nussbaum 1996; Batson 2011), which makes it conceptually distinct from pity and paternalism.

Compassion entails a feeling—being moved by suffering, with some people more or less inclined toward experiencing it than others. It is not constant across the population. Put another way, people have different propensities toward experiencing or feeling compassion. Although compassion is often described as an emotional (affective) state that tends to prompt prosocial behavior, it is not always “turned on” as it relates to politics. Hence, I consider it a disposition, something that can be connected to opinions or be unrelated depending on whether it is activated by elites.

Thinking about psychological constructs in dispositional terms is not new. Stenner (2005) uses the same approach to understanding the effects of authoritarianism. Specific political conditions, in Stenner’s case normative threat, activate the disposition. In the case of compassion, critical conditions are elite messages that either appeal to compassion or to other considerations. Hence, I argue that compassion will primarily be consequential in public opinion when people associate it with a given issue. When political elites do not make compassion relevant for a given policy area, compassion should be less consequential in structuring public opinion.

Compassion should not affect preferences on all issues. By its very definition,

when using the adjective version of the word, compassionate, instead of, “highly empathically concerned.”

compassion involves wanting to see someone's welfare improved. Thus, compassion prompts support for helping those who people perceive to be suffering (Rudolph et al. 2004). In one study, compassion motivated volunteering or helping others when no reward was given (Omoto et al. 2010). In other cases, compassion has proven to motivate help and support even when doing so entails a personal cost (Batson 2011). Hence, compassion should be connected to matters that involve people potentially in need.

The Laswellian definition of politics— who gets what, when, and how — implicitly has need as its core. Those in need may get something, such as through government programs. Consequently, how compassionate a person is ought to influence his or her opinions and actions as they relate to supporting those in need of help. In this way, political compassion can be thought of as, "...program support grounded in perceived group need" (Huddy et al. 2001, 447). Needs might include such things as food, shelter, disaster relief, health care, or even life, as is the case in abortion or capital punishment. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, he provides a list of needs that might prompt compassion, and they are still relevant today: "deaths, bodily damages, bodily afflictions, old age, illnesses, and lack of food" (Nussbaum 2013, 263). Needs could be longstanding, such as being a less privileged group in society, or short-lived, such as those suffering the aftereffects of a natural disaster.

I focus specifically on the role compassion plays in public opinion about government assistance to the poor, abortion policy, health care, immigration, and disability policy.⁶ These issues provide a lens through which to examine the link

⁶ Greater support for those in need does not necessarily require greater support for public policy to address those needs. However, if messages connect compassion to a public policy solution, which is what political speeches are generally

between elite messages about the recipients of compassion and, in turn, the influence of compassion on public opinion.

My research finds that those who are more compassionate have attitudes that are more supportive of welfare spending and greater government assistance to the disabled. The more compassionate are also less supportive of exclusionary immigration policies and capital punishment. Compassion explains preferences on these issues net of ideology, and at times, its effect is even larger. At least, this is true among Democratic Party identifiers. I argue that this is because Democratic elites have regularly framed these particular issues in terms of compassion, while Republican elites have not. Put another way, Democratic elites have “turned on” compassion among their followers in the electorate. Republican leaders have generally not done so and, in some cases, have done the opposite. However, the reverse is true of abortion. On this issue, compassion predicts increased support for more restrictive abortion policy, but only among Republican identifiers. My content work demonstrates that on this issue, it is Republican elites that frame it in terms of compassion, while Democrats connect the issue to individual rights. As a consequence, more compassionate Republicans are more pro-life than less compassionate Republicans, while compassion is largely not a predictor of Democrats’ views.

Compassion is a Hallmark of Human Nature

The lack of emphasis until now on compassion’s role in politics is likely a

about, it seems likely that people will connect their compassion to government-oriented solutions. In my experiments, I include dependent variables to measure non-governmental support, and I do not find that political appeals influence the likelihood of nongovernmental support for those in need.

consequence of misconceptions about human nature. Influenced by a perspective of humans as motivated by selfish instincts rooted in evolutionary mechanisms, economic and political theories have often assumed narrow self-interest as a starting point for understanding human interaction (see Mansbridge 1990 for a review). Yet recent developments in biology and psychology provide substantial evidence to challenge such assumptions.

A consensus is emerging around the idea that humans are inherently driven not just by self-centered concerns but also by compassionate motivations (Bloom 2013; Brown et al. 2011; Keltner 2009). An emotional response to others' suffering seems to be innate in humans, emerging early in life. Findings in developmental psychology provide direct evidence for the central role of compassion in human nature, demonstrating that even infants show simultaneous propensities for both selfishness and a desire to help others (Bloom 2013). In another study, two-year olds demonstrated sympathetic arousal in response to helping others or to seeing others being helped, indicating that they did not have to receive credit for helping in order to experience concern for others (Hepach et al. 2012). Brain imaging studies provide further confirmation, demonstrating that people can experience empathy for others they have not even met (Decety 2011). Neuroscientists find that compassionate responses light up very old parts of the mammalian brain, suggesting it arose early in humans' evolution (see Goetz et al. 2010; Keltner 2012).

Evolutionary psychologists theorize that humans' widespread use of compassion developed primarily in response to the unique vulnerability of children (compared to the young of other species), who thus require a cooperative system of care (Hrdy 2005). A

second reason evolutionary psychologists cite for compassion's adaptive role is mate selection (see Goetz et al. 2010).⁷ "Compassionate reproductive partners should be more likely devote more resources to offspring, to provide physical care, and to create cooperative, caring communities so vital to the survival of offspring" (Goetz et al. 2010, 355). Importantly, scientists also argue that compassion evolved to promote cooperative relationships between non-kin individuals, as a way to motivate helping behavior (see Goetz et al. 2010 for review). For these reasons, an evolutionary advantage was conferred upon groups that helped one another, and this helping behavior was encouraged by an innate concern for others in need (Decety 2012; DeWaal 2010). In fact, Charles Darwin argued that compassion is a hallmark of human nature, even stronger than many other human instincts (Darwin 1871).

While compassion may have been designed to advantage early human groups, it operates outside of such constraints today, similar to how other aspects of human nature function differently in modern life. Evolutionary theorists propose that humans' system of care was extended to caring for vulnerable people in society at large. Compassion for needy people likely evolved within a system of social exchange of helping those who contributed to the group and punishing those who did not (Petersen et al. 2012).

This is key to the connection of compassion to politics. If humans were only capable of caring about their families or neighbors, compassion's role in politics might be rather limited. Instead, people can feel compassion for those whom they have never met. People express compassion for others affected by tragedies, such as natural disasters, donating money and blood to help with disaster relief. People endorse support

⁷ On a recent survey, roughly 90 percent of both Republicans and Democrats said compassion was very important to them in a partner (Pew Social Trends Poll 2010).

for public policies that help others in need, and my survey research finds that compassion predicts such views when issues have been connected to politics by elites.

In summary, rather than humans being primarily selfish, research in evolutionary and developmental psychology finds that we are both selfish and pro-social. Today's scientists concede that, "...survival of the kindest may be just as fitting a description of our species as survival of the fittest" (Keltner 2009).

Below, I explicate my theory that explains how compassion becomes activated and under what conditions. Before that, however, it is important to distinguish compassion conceptually from other related terms. I argue that, among these related terms, compassion is the most useful for understanding political behavior.

What Compassion is Not

Behaviors and attitudes that are oriented toward others instead of the self are collectively referred to as being *pro-social*. Among these, compassion is unique in its utility for understanding politics. The key distinction between compassion and other pro-social concepts is that compassion is expressly about concern for others in need. According to Martha Nussbaum, compassion is the primary social emotion because it expands spheres of concern and leads to increased social justice. While many pro-social concepts ought to be correlated with compassion, they have important conceptual differences. I outline these important differences here.

Sympathy is the most difficult concept to distinguish from compassion because it has three different prevailing definitions, one of which is synonymous with compassion. Some researchers use the term sympathy for what I am calling compassion. Taking this

into account, I use some examples of work that refers to sympathy, but only when the term is clearly used as a synonym for compassion. The second common definition of sympathy means support or favorability toward an issue or group, broadly construed. Thus, if someone is sympathetic toward a cause, they are simply inclined to support it. The third definition of sympathy is the same as the term pity, which is distinct from compassion and is explained in greater detail below. In sum, sympathy has several definitions, only one of which is synonymous with compassion. Hence, I try to avoid using the term sympathy so as to not confuse the concept with pity or with general feelings of favorability toward an issue or group.

Empathy is also similar to compassion, but differs in important ways. There are two types of empathy: *emotional empathy* and *cognitive empathy*. Both occur in response to some of the same stimuli that would lead to compassion, such as witnessing or imagining another person who is suffering. Compassion is synonymous with Batson's term, "empathic concern," and he uses that term instead of empathy for good reason. A careful examination of empathy's precise definition reveals it is not always sufficient for compassion to occur, and compassion may occur without empathy. First, emotional empathy is defined as a secondhand experience of another's emotion. In other words, one must experience the emotion another person is feeling (Haidt 2003; Lazarus 1991). While empathy is typically thought about as, "feeling another's pain" it can be the experience of any emotion, such as empathic joy. In this way empathy differs from compassion is that it can include positive emotions and does not have to be about others in need. Moreover, it is not necessary to experience another's emotion in order to care and want to see another person's welfare improved (Batson 2011). As

Nussbaum (1996) argues, the vicarious experience of another's suffering is not required for compassion. Likewise, Ekman explains: "When I see somebody fall down in the street, I don't have to feel their hurt in order to be motivated to help them" (2016, 1).⁸

Cognitive empathy is also distinct from compassion. Cognitive empathy—the ability to understand others' emotions—is commonly operationalized using the Mind in Eyes Test (MIE) (Feldman et al. n.d.). MIE attempts to capture how well one reads other people's emotions through their facial expressions. To take the test, participants are given images of faces where only the eye portion of the face is visible and asked to identify the emotion experienced by the person in the picture (Vellante et al. 2013). The ability to read emotions may be easier for those who are socially adept but not necessarily more caring. Lowenstein and Small observe: "Empathy...can be used to undermine the person—for example, to deliver a particularly devastating attack, as well as to benefit them" (2007, 115). Many criminals with antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy are skilled at interpreting others' emotions, suggesting it confers an advantage in criminality (Dolan and Fullam 2004). Studies of criminal populations find that psychopaths are unique in their absence of concern for victims, but they do not lack an ability to understand a victim's perspective (Dolan and Fullam 2004, 1093). In other research, empathic accuracy was only weakly correlated with a measure of agreeableness, with agreeableness measured as being "sympathetic," a term related to compassion (Krauss et al. 2010).

⁸According to cognitive neuroscientist Tania Singer (2013, 1), "...it is crucial to distinguish between empathy, which is in itself not necessarily a good thing, and compassion. When I empathize with the suffering of others, I feel the pain of others; I am suffering myself. This can become so intense that it produces empathic distress in me and in the long run could lead to burnout and withdrawal. In contrast, if we feel compassion for someone else's suffering, we do not necessarily feel with their pain but we feel concern – a feeling of love and warmth – and we can develop a strong motivation to help the other."

Thus empathy, and the MIE test operationally, ought not be confused with or used as a measure of compassion. Although empathy can prompt compassion, it does not always do so. People can read emotions without having concern for others in need. Moreover, one does not necessarily have to fully experience the emotions of another in order to experience compassion for them.

Altruism is another pro-social concept that should not be confused with compassion. It is defined as, “prosocial *behavior* that is not based on concrete external rewards” (Eisenberg 2000, 681). Whereas compassion is in the attitudinal realm, altruism is in the behavioral realm. This makes altruism an attractive variable to study because it can be operationalized as a specific action and does not require knowing a person’s underlying beliefs. Yet one does not need to engage in specific behaviors in order for something to have political relevance. Although compassion might prompt an individual to be altruistic, it can also influence attitudes toward supporting those in need.

The definition of altruism as a behavior constitutes a further limitation: people may help others for a variety of reasons besides compassion. Those reasons could include social norms or pressures, a desire to be well-liked, a commitment to a certain religion, or a general personality trait of kindness. For instance, in one experiment, people who behaved altruistically received social rewards in their relative status from others in the group, implying that a primary motivation for altruistic behavior is gaining an advantage in status (Hardy and Vugt 2006).

Another reason that altruism is less attractive for understanding the basis of political attitudes is that, unlike compassion, it does not require the beneficiary to be in need. Instead, altruism, by definition, entails the act of helping another person without

consideration of the person's attributes. Because altruistic people could be as likely to help any person regardless of need or judgments of deservingness, elites will not be able to appeal to altruistic behavior through different characterizations of the recipients of help. This makes it potentially less relevant to understanding the relationship between politicians and the electorate.⁹

Humanitarianism is also distinct from compassion in a significant way.

Humanitarianism is defined as both concern for another plus a sense of moral duty (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001). These two concepts can occur independently of each other and, I argue, should be measured separately.

Duty alone is important in the study of political behavior. Comparative analysis of voter turnout finds that a sense of civic duty is one of the most critical variables in predicting whether or not someone votes (Blais 2000). Yet duty is clearly not the same concept as compassion. Moreover, researchers have muddied the waters by using different items to measure humanitarianism, some of which closely resemble those used to measure compassion (e.g. Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Newman et al. 2015; Feldman et al. n.d.). For this reason, some of the findings using the humanitarianism scale may closely parallel what one would find using the compassion scale. However, it is important to distinguish between the definitions of these terms and to make clear that compassion is a separate concept from duty, and hence humanitarianism.

When assessing the potential benefits or drawbacks to compassion's influence

⁹ Like many of these concepts, it is important to note that some scholars do not adhere to the same definitions. Here, I am building upon the most widely used definitions used in the social science literature. If some researchers use the term altruism to mean the same thing as compassion, they are mislabeling the concept.

on political preferences, it is essential to distinguish it from pity. Similar to compassion, *pity* entails feeling concern for others, but it also implies a sense of superiority over the beneficiary. This, in turn, suggests the beneficiary is not fully valued (Fiske et al. 2002). Indeed, some suggest that helping others because of pity can be a vehicle for holding power over them, serving the interests of the giver of help more than the recipients (Elster 1990). As Lazarus (1994, 228) puts it, pity is a, “disdainful or contemptuous feeling, in which the other person is regarded as reprehensible, inferior, or responsible for his/her own suffering...the person holds himself or herself apart of the afflicted person and there may be a degree of condescension.”

Compassion, on the other hand, “respects the equality of all people” (Shepherd 2003, 450). Unlike pity, compassion does not include the judgment that those in need of help are inferior. The most widely accepted definition of compassion entails feeling concern and wishing to help in ways that respect the full agency of others (Nussbaum 1996).

Finally, although compassion is akin to Jonathan Haidt’s delineation of the *Harm/Care* moral foundation, it constitutes only the “care” component of the dimension. In Haidt’s estimation, greater attention to avoiding harm is defined as the same concept as an orientation toward care. However, at least one analysis found only a modest correlation between compassion and the Harm/Care dimension (Hirsh et al. 2010). Haidt’s Moral Foundations Theory explains that, for political liberals, harm and care are central considerations in morality, while for conservatives, a host of different values and orientations drive their moral opinions (2012). However, his theory does not explain where these different moral orientations arise from and does not look in depth into each

orientation. My research investigates individual differences in concern for others and the role of elites in activating those differences among partisans.

Table 2 provides a list of the primary pro-social concepts that have received attention in political science and psychology and includes how each concept has been measured. Political scientists have used a variety of ways to measure pro-social behavior and dispositions, including survey items, dictator games in a lab setting, and the Mind in Eye test. Psychology researchers have utilized biological measurements to study both empathy and compassion, including fMRI measures of mirror neurons, skin conductance tests, and heart rate measures.

TABLE 2 Measures of Pro-Social Concepts in Political Science and Psychology

Concept	Measurement(s)
Harm/Care Dimension	Survey response (Haidt 2012)
Empathy	Mind in Eye Test (Feldman et al. n.d.) Survey response (Davis 1980) Mirror-neurons (Decety and Jackson 2004)
Altruism	In-depth interviews (Monroe 1996) Dictator games (Fowler and Kam 2007)
Humanitarianism	Survey response (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001)
Compassion	Biological measures of vagal activity (Stellar et al. 2015) Survey response (Long forthcoming)

Because I do not have separate measures of all pro-social concepts on the surveys I use, I cannot be certain that compassion is the sole concept being captured by the survey items. Indeed, prior work has shown that several of these prosocial orientations are correlated (Feldman and Steenbergen 2001). My intention here is to clearly define and distinguish compassion from these other related terms. Compassion is distinct from other pro-social terms in that it is expressly about people in need and it

can influence attitudes as well as behaviors. For these reasons, compassion is a better avenue to increase our understanding of the political behavior of both elites and the electorate. To establish the validity of the concept as I have measured it, I am able to demonstrate through my analysis of surveys that it is correlated with things it should be and is not correlated with items that it should not be. Future work would ideally have measures of different concepts to distinguish their distinct effects on political behavior.

Measuring Compassion: Introduction to the Items

Although compassion would seem to have clear implications for public opinion, only recently have political surveys attempted to measure it. Recall I conceptualize compassion as a disposition that is centrally about concern for those in need. My theory argues that existing stores of compassion can be connected to political opinions depending on if elites have talked about the issue in compassionate terms and if the target of compassion is perceived as deserving. I use several survey items to measure a person's propensity toward compassion. The General Social Survey asked two items in 2002, 2004, 2012, and 2014 that are useful for assessing how compassionate a person is. Specifically, the GSS asked the following: 1) "*People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate,*" and 2) "*These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others.*" Respondents received five response options, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. These items capture a concern for others in need and a desire for their well-being to be improved.¹⁰ I transform both items onto a (0-1) interval, combine them additively, and take the mean.

¹⁰ I use passive voice because the definition does not *require* actively addressing the problem but rather a desire to see it improved.

While neither item is a perfect measure of compassion, combining them into a scale helps to remedy their respective conceptual limitations. To best understand how they capture compassion, it is useful to turn again to the precise definition of compassion: *concern for others in need and a desire for their welfare to be improved*. This definition specifically entails feeling concern and wishing someone's plight to be improved. The first of the two items captures the idea of helping others, which is a key component. The first item also specifically labels others as being in need when referring to them as "less fortunate." The idea of need is also a hallmark of compassion. One potential limitation of the first item is that it may bring to mind for some a sense of duty in its use of the words, "*should* be willing."

The second item, however, does not use the word, "should" instead opting for the word, "need," lessening the prospect of judgment of others. This item captures the idea of people moving their primary focus away from, "look[ing] after themselves." It specifically denotes a concern for others by specifying that one "worry about others." One potential limitation to the second item, however, is that it may call to mind values of self-reliance by referring to people looking after themselves. In that case, we would expect conservatives to differ from liberals on this measure. However, as I will show, they do not. In sum, the use of these items in combination provides a better measure of an orientation toward compassion than either item alone.

Simply asking people about their tendencies regarding compassion is in line with common ways of assessing other personality traits. Measuring personality through surveys is a common practice in social science. For instance, a study of a brief form of the Big Five personality characteristics found that the survey items converged with self

and observer reports and had high test-retest reliability (Gosling et al. 2003).

Essentially, people's ratings of their personality traits were similar to ratings of them by other people, and these measures showed consistency over time.

However, there are potential downsides to relying on self-assessments.

Respondents might be concerned with appearing favorable to others by answering in socially acceptable ways, known as social desirability bias (Macoby and Macoby 1954).

If this were a large factor, one could imagine that most people would rate themselves as highly compassionate. Yet I find that there is actually a fairly wide distribution of responses for both items. The second item has an even wider distribution, which is likely because of its reverse nature. People may feel less compelled to rate themselves at the extreme pole on the reverse item. In addition to the wide distribution, I am able to further demonstrate the measure's merit by showing that it works as expected. In sum, these items provide the best measure of compassion available in large political surveys.

Who has Compassion? Demographic Correlates to Compassion

Based on these measures, I find that the propensity to feel compassion is correlated with several demographic characteristics. Table 3 includes the average levels of compassion broken down by a range of different social characteristics. Across the surveys, education is the strongest correlate of compassion: higher education levels are correlated with greater compassion. Gender is correlated more modestly with compassion: women respond as somewhat more compassionate than men on average,

which is consistent with prior related research (McCue and Gopoian 2000).¹¹ Age has the second largest correlation, where older respondents respond as more compassionate than younger ones. This is in accordance with research on the related concept of empathy (O'Brien et al. 2012). Notably, one's compassion level is unrelated to racial group. This differs from work on the related but distinct concept of empathy. Recent research asserts that racial minorities ought to be more empathetic because of their own experience with discrimination (Sirin et al. 2016; Segal et al. 2011). Finally, while I do not find mean differences in compassion for those with different income levels, the survey data does not allow me to distinguish the very wealthy from other groups. Recent research in psychology suggests that those with particularly high incomes appear to have lower compassion (Stellar et al. 2012; Piff et al. 2010).¹²

TABLE 3 Dispositional Compassion and Demographic Characteristics

		Mean	Standard Deviation	n
Gender	Male	0.642	0.163	568
	Female	0.689	0.170	719
Age	Youngest third	0.635	0.167	462
	Middle third	0.685	0.167	425
	Oldest third	0.701	0.162	400
Education	Less than high school	0.631	0.164	192
	High school degree	0.649	0.170	366
	Bachelors degree or more	0.715	0.157	385
Race	White	0.669	0.167	961
	African-American	0.669	0.187	194
	Hispanic	0.639	0.157	174

¹¹ Experiments suggest that women are more empathetic than men due to motivational differences, not to different inherent abilities. In one experiment, when there was the prospect for monetary rewards, men performed just as well on a test of empathic accuracy as women did; however, when there was no monetary gain, women demonstrated greater empathic accuracy (Klein and Hodges 2001).

¹² I intend to explore this more in future research.

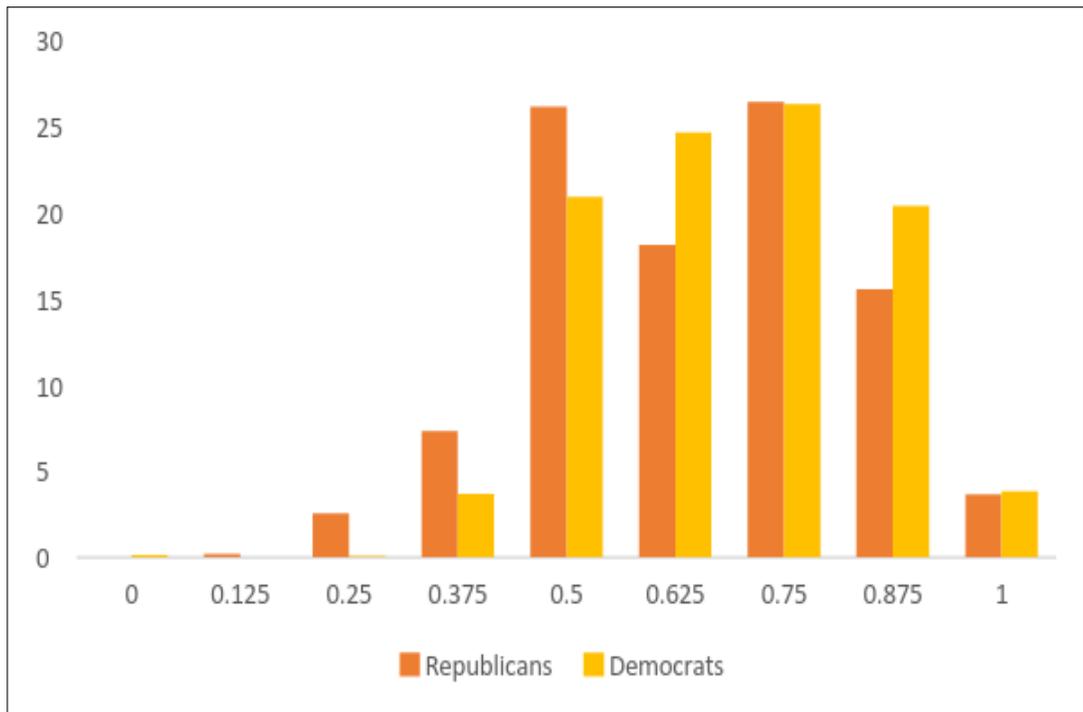
Family Income	Less than \$30,000	0.666	0.174	408
	\$30,000-\$75,000	0.657	0.162	398
	Greater than \$75,000	0.673	0.168	481

Source: 2012 General Social Survey

Partisanship and Dispositional Compassion

Because the parties espouse different ways of approaching those in need, responses to the survey items measuring compassion could in fact be endogenous to politics. Evidence for this would manifest as large differences in compassion depending on party identification. Instead, I find that the items appear to tap a general propensity to experience compassion, as they are designed to do. Consider the results that appear in Figure 2. The percentage of Republicans in the top compassion group is identical to that of Democrats. Likewise, 27 percent of both Republicans and Democrats respond in the third highest compassion interval. Although there are some differences in the middle and low compassion intervals, they are small, producing sample means for Republicans and Democrats that are nearly the same. Republicans score an average of 0.649, which is statistically indistinguishable from the Democrats' average of 0.687.

FIGURE 2 Distribution of Compassion

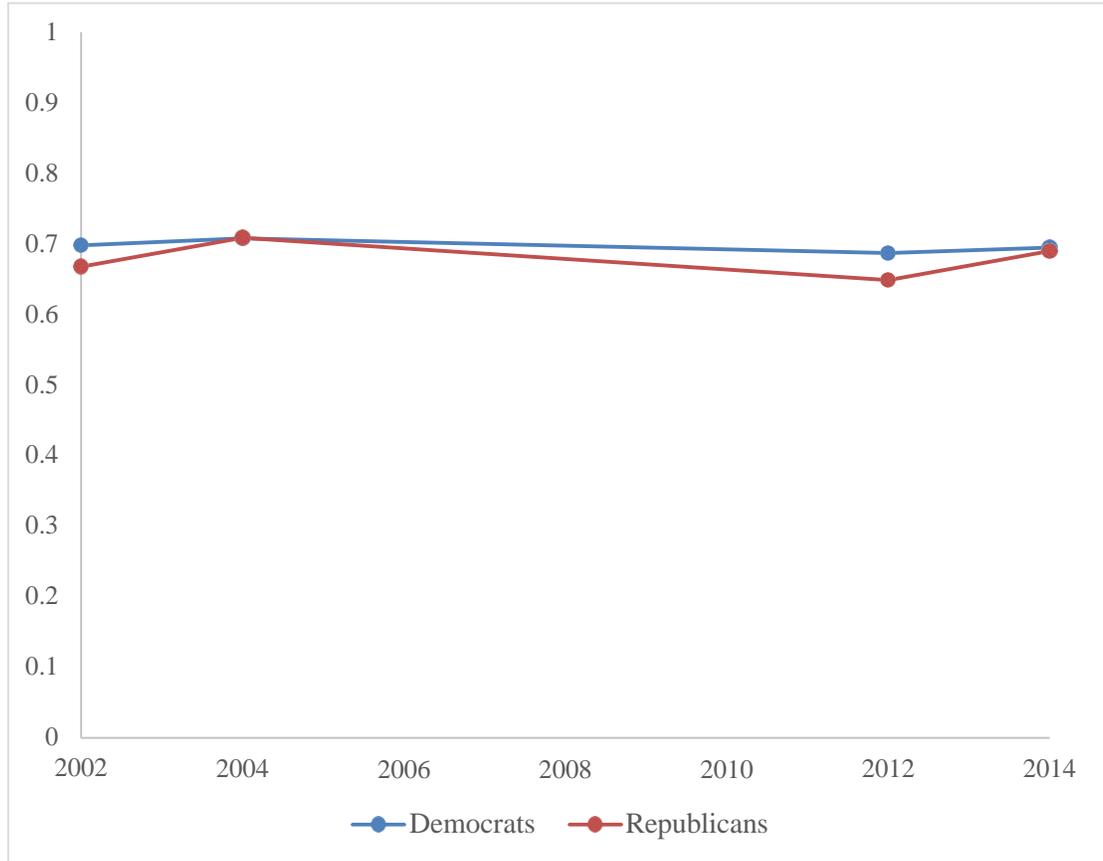


Source: General Social Survey 2012

Turning to responses over time, it becomes even clearer my measure of compassion is not colored by partisanship. Figure 3 plots the average compassion levels in all the years the GSS has asked these items: 2002, 2004, 2012, and 2014.

Republicans and Democrats respond as similarly inclined, on average, to feel concern for others. The means hover around 0.7 on a 0 to 1 interval, with differences between the parties never more than 0.04 points.

FIGURE 3 Partisan Levels of Compassion over Time



Comparing partisan differences in compassion to differences in other attitudes is also informative. In Table 4, I include partisan differences in compassion in the year those differences were greatest, 2012, and two other constructs, racial resentment and moral traditionalism measured the same year. The differences between Democrats and Republicans on their measures of compassion are a little less than 4 percentage points. Yet for both racial resentment and moral traditionalism, mass partisans differ by more than 20 percentage points. Thus while compassion may appear to be central to the different policy approaches taken by the major parties, it is actually something on which Republican and Democratic partisans are largely similar. It is not levels of compassion that differ by party. Instead I will show that it is how compassion informs political

views that differs greatly between different party identifiers. Specifically, compassion has a larger and more consistent impact on Democrats' preferences on a larger range of issues. Perhaps if compassion were made more central to Republicans' preferences on more issues, it could be a key component to overcoming polarization among partisans in the public.

TABLE 4 Mean Differences in Compassion among Partisans

Means	Democrats	Republicans	Absolute Difference
Compassion (GSS 2012)	0.687	0.649	0.038
Racial Resentment	0.509	0.728	0.219
Moral Traditionalism	0.438	0.639	0.201

Source: American National Election Study, 1996 and 2012. General Social Survey, 2012

Connecting Compassion to Political Behavior: The Role of Parties

These results are a striking departure from the conventional wisdom about the parties and compassion. At least in terms of a propensity to experience compassion, one side is not more soft-hearted than the other. This suggests that perhaps the most interesting puzzle in the study of political compassion is, if Democrats and Republicans are similarly compassionate, why do they display such wide divisions in their compassion for specific groups and about the importance of compassion in politics generally?

My research suggests the explanation lies in the way politicians talk about issues. Elites have the capacity to cause their followers to either connect compassion to politics or not. I show in Chapter 2 that Democratic elites emphasize compassion for a host of social welfare issues that affect a wide range of groups in need, which, I argue, causes Democrats in the electorate to form preferences with compassion in mind. Republican leaders, in contrast, use compassionate language much less often, instead

highlighting considerations such as individual rights and the role of the private sector in helping those in need. On abortion policy, however, I find the reverse of this general tendency. Republican elites use rhetoric to evoke compassion for the unborn, whereas Democratic elites use the language of individual rights. These differences in elite rhetoric begin to reveal an explanation. Democrats attempt to tap into people's compassion more often than Republicans do. My survey analysis and experimental findings suggest that when compassion is not made relevant, it does not explain political preferences among citizens. Yet when elites connect compassion to a given issue, it becomes consequential to understanding individuals' preferences.

Thus I argue that people who are inclined toward compassion are more likely to respond in a compassionate way than those who are less inclined, but only if compassionate considerations have been made relevant. People who have a lower propensity toward compassion are unlikely to be moved when such concerns are made salient, and perhaps may become even less supportive when such a connection is made. In fact, my experiments provide evidence suggesting that among the small percentage of people at the lowest end of the compassion scale, compassionate messages actually decrease their desire to provide support to others in need.

My thinking is consistent with political science research on framing effects. These studies consistently show that elite level discussion has consequences for mass attitudes. Framing theory explains how rhetorical frames are used to describe the crux of a problem and characterize how it should be thought about by encouraging people to draw on specific relevant considerations to inform their preferences (Nelson and Kinder 1996). Frames are commonly used in public discourse and serve as a way to, "teach

ordinary citizens how to think about and understand complex social problems” (Nelson and Kinder 1996, 1058). Recently, the use of moral rhetoric by elites was found to strengthen the use of corresponding considerations, such as caring for others, in policy attitudes (Clifford and Jerit 2013).

People have conflicting views about political issues, and the dominant view they hold at any given time is determined in part by what considerations are at the tops of their heads (Zaller 1992). Framing studies demonstrate that attitudes are influenced by the importance individuals place on potentially competing considerations in response to political stimuli (Nelson et al. 1997). It follows, then, that for people to employ compassion in their political thinking, it must be called to mind as a consideration for it to shape their preferences. I expect that partisans will be more likely to accept appeals—and hence use their levels of compassion in forming their opinions—if they come from their own party leaders (e.g. Dalton et al. 1998; Zaller 1992; Slothuus and Vreese 2010). And, importantly, people will respond to these appeals differently based on their inclinations toward compassion.

Hence, my theory posits that elite appeals activate the effect of compassion on issue preferences. This manifests as a widening of the difference in support between those who score high and those who score low on compassion. I provide evidence suggesting that when people are consistently exposed to messages connecting compassion to politics, opinions diverge between low and high compassion respondents. This is why, among Democrats in the electorate, there are divisions in policy preferences between respondents at the different ends of the compassion scale. For Republicans, such a divide is primarily apparent in the non-political realm of charitable

giving, with the only political issue evidencing a similar divide being abortion.

Compassionate Appeals and Perceptions of Control

I find that more than the absence or presence of compassionate rhetoric is necessary to activate compassion. My research suggests the important role that people's perceptions about the recipients in need play in determining how the parties appeal to compassion. My content analysis finds that Democratic leaders are more likely to appeal to compassion for groups who are viewed as partially responsible for their needs. This suggests that Democratic identifiers in the electorate are exposed to more messages highlighting compassion for more "complex" targets of compassion. This aspect of appeals likely affects how important certain criteria are for partisans to experience compassion. Since Democratic identifiers more regularly grapple with policy positions that connect compassion for groups seen as somewhat in control of their circumstances, such criteria might be less critical in determining whether or not compassion is relevant to their views or not. I expect that Republicans, on the other hand, will be much more likely to use compassion to guide their opinions when they perceive a beneficiary's actions as not having caused his or her plight.

Several important criteria inform attributions of worthiness of compassion. In this section, I explain how factors that inhibit or facilitate the expression of compassion help us understand current political debates. The most critical factor is the perception of control. This is the perception about whether a person or group in need has contributed, or is contributing, in some way to her plight.

In politics, citizens may seek to understand issues by making judgments about

the characteristics of the groups affected by a public policy (Gilens 1999). These judgments are particularly important in deciphering compassion's role in politics. My analysis finds that party leaders strategically define who is in need of compassion and who is worthy of compassion. These considerations ought to affect whether compassion guides the preferences of mass partisans. Indeed, a key element of compassion is whether people deem individuals or groups as "deserving" of concern (Goetz et al. 2010; Reyna and Weiner 2001; Petersen et al. 2012). Even a highly compassionate person would not be likely to connect his or her propensity to supporting groups that they believe are undeserving of compassion.

Political theorists as well as scholars in psychology have reasoned that, in order to experience compassion, one cannot blame the person in need for being the cause of their need. In Aristotle's "Rhetoric," he wrote that a priority for experiencing compassion was an appraisal of deservingness, which was informed by perceptions of another's character and motives. Thus "deserved suffering should lead to blame and reproach, whereas undeserved suffering should elicit compassion" (Goetz et al. 2010, 8). For instance, a portrayal of a recipient of food stamps who was not looking for a job would be less likely to prompt compassion than a similar portrayal of a person who was actively searching for a job but had not found one yet.

According to evolutionary psychologists, attributions of deservingness or blame are universal and rooted in evolutionary mechanisms. Humans' early compassionate inclinations to share with the needy were tempered by reactions of anger toward those who tried to take help without contributing to the group (Petersen et al. 2012). This plays out in political life today. For example, these types of appraisals are central facets

of the debates surrounding policies toward undocumented immigrants and welfare recipients. Designations of blame or responsibility, in turn, influence the likelihood of feeling compassion (Goetz et al. 2010) and, hence, compassion's effect on policy preferences about the group in need.

Politics is often centered on perceptions of deservingness. Americans believe that the, "resources of government...should go to those who deserve it" (Nelson and Kinder 1996, 1071). A survey about preferences regarding government support for different descriptions of problems points to several different deservingness criteria. First, the level of need determines deservingness (van Oorschot 2000). The more in need someone is, the more they are seen as deserving of help and support. Nussbaum characterizes the concept of need as, "an appraisal of the seriousness of various predicaments" (2003, 14). In a study about support for government spending on Social Security and Medicare, respondents were more supportive of spending if they believed older people had a poor financial situation (Huddy et al. 2001). More recently, researchers have also uncovered the importance of relative need. In one study, people were more supportive of increased social welfare assistance when they read about a family that had lost a great deal than a family who had lost less, even when both conditions depicted a family who was currently in the same financial straits (Delton et al.).

Yet elite framing of political issues is likely less capable of shifting overall perceptions of need. People may not dispute that a person is homeless, but they might perceive different causes of his or her homelessness, for example. Thus, a second criteria of deservingness is more integral to understanding politics: perceived level of

control of the recipients (van Oorschot 2000). In prior psychological studies, physical conditions deemed low on controllability, such as blindness or cancer, evoked concern, while those rated high on controllability, such as obesity or drug abuse, evoked anger instead (Weiner et al. 1988). In one study, a description of students who failed an exam they did not study for yielded less compassion than a description of students who failed and had studied hard (Reyna and Weiner 2001), suggesting that the activation of compassion includes a, “judgment of fairness or justice.” (Goetz et al. 2010, 11). In another experiment, a description of someone who contracted AIDS through engaging in promiscuous sexual activity received less sympathy than a person who contracted it through a blood transfusion. Similarly, descriptions of the person who had AIDS as taking his medication received sympathy while those describing the person as not taking his medication elicited anger (Schwarzer and Weiner 1991). Attribution-based theories assert that perceptions about controllability influence whether one feels sympathy or anger, and that this then affects whether one is likely to endorse helping another person (Rudolph et al. 2004).¹³

The assessment of control essentially inquires of recipients, “Why are you needy?” (van Oorschot 2000, 43). This question of *why* is important to our understanding of compassion’s influence in public opinion. When people view recipients as responsible for their plight, compassion is not likely to be activated and people will, in turn, be less likely to support providing assistance. For instance, a World Values Survey shows that across countries, perceptions of welfare recipients as lazy are

¹³Multiple studies suggest that anger is a likely opposite reaction to compassion, particularly when people are asked or expected to feel compassion and perceive the recipient as undeserving.

correlated with opposition to government involvement in reducing poverty (Petersen et al. 2012).

People make judgments about control in conjunction with their assessments about levels of need. Thus people may determine that someone's, "suffering exceeds the measures of the fault" (Nussbaum 2003, 15). To illustrate how individuals typically make these assessments of need and control, consider a large survey in which people rated 27 different descriptions of people in need. Of the groups described, survey respondents rated the following as the most worthy of support: people disabled as a result of their work, sick people, people not able to work, and people with poor health (van Oorschot 2000). In the case of the group respondents perceived as the most deserving—people disabled as a result of their work—respondents also inferred positive characteristics about their work ethic.

In a similar study, people were much more in favor of providing support to families with children than those without, with increasing numbers of children generating more support. The same was true for families in which the father was disabled and could not work or when the father was actively looking for work (Will 1993). These examples also point to the qualifications of level of need (number of children) and degree of control over the situation (looking for work versus not looking for work). These are all examples of those whose plights can be characterized as largely out of their personal control.

In contrast, of the 27 groups described above, respondents rated as the least deserving those who were not willing to work (van Oorschot 2000). Similarly, another study found that respondents were least supportive of providing assistance to a family in

which the unemployed parent was explicitly not looking for work, particularly when the story described that individual as picky, such as interested only in work that paid at least the minimum wage (Will 1993). While these groups are also in need, the information provided about them ascribed a greater level of control to their situations, and respondents likely perceived them as highly responsible for their plights.

Finally, psychological experiments suggest that, when individuals or groups are perceived to have had some control over their plights, the default is not to have compassion for them because they are deemed undeserving of compassion. In such instances, elite messages may be required to override perceptions of blame. For instance, a politician might emphasize the role of the recession in creating someone's need for government food assistance. This would theoretically decrease the perception that the person in need had control over her plight, thereby increasing the designation of deservingness, and, in turn compassion toward her. In contrast, when a group's needs are widely perceived as not being internally controllable, it may be easier to evoke compassion than to turn it off.

In sum, "Whether people in need can be blamed or can be held responsible for their neediness seems to be a general and central criterion for deservingness" (van Oorschot 2000, 43). Different assessments of control can lead to different levels of political support and influence how effective appeals to compassion will be. Below, I outline how the parties differ in their likelihood of appealing to compassion for certain groups and why these differences matter for the connection of politics to compassion among partisans in the electorate.

Controllability, Ideology, and Partisanship

People in general are prone to attribute others' behavior to personal strengths or weaknesses, and they infer the role of situational factors only after engaging in more effortful processing (Gilbert 1988). Americans are particularly committed to the value of individualism, and, likely for this reason, they are more prone than people in other developed democracies to attribute people's problems to personal failings (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Moreover, conservatives, who by definition are more devoted to an individualistic philosophy, are more likely than liberals to ascribe others' plights as being individually controlled rather than externally caused (Skittka et al. 2002; Brandt 2013).

While conservatives are more likely to ascribe individual control to people's situations, my work suggests that this baseline thinking can be overcome by elite messages. My experiments test the importance of these attributions in activating compassion. I predict that Republicans will place greater weight on frames that emphasize a lack of internal control in responding compassionately or not. Because I find that Democratic elites call for compassion for a wider variety of groups under more varied circumstances, I predict assessments of controllability will be less influential in activating compassion among Democrats than they will be among Republicans.

Below, I provide a general categorization of the main issues I examine in my research in order to illustrate how the two parties appeal to groups with different assumed causes of needs. Table 5 lists the issues related to compassion that I explore through political speeches, experiments and survey data. These are, of course, not all possible groups in need affected by politics, and many of these groups overlap.

However, the template is a useful way to think about the way politicians appeal to groups based on the perceived causes of their needs. My subsequent predictions about elite rhetoric and mass behavior stem from each of these classifications.

First, I classify each group into one of two categories regarding beliefs about causes of need. I designate a group as having internal control when there is the potential for elites to portray the group in need as responsible for its plight. For example, some people might view poverty as caused by individual choices. Hence, I categorize that issue as internally controllable, even though others might perceive it as predominantly due to external forces. Thus the only issues I categorize as externally caused are ones for which there is little to no ability to portray such individuals as having control over their plight. For example, disability and illness are conditions that almost all people view as outside of a person's individual control.

Second, I denote whether using compassion for the associated policy area would be advantageous to the Democratic or Republican Party. For example, appealing to compassion for the unborn would be politically in line with Republican Party policy stances toward abortion restrictions, but it would be counter to Democrats' goals of abortion rights. In contrast, appealing to compassion for poor people would be in accordance with Democratic Party policies of providing greater government assistance to the poor but in opposition to Republican tenets of smaller government.

TABLE 5 A Categorization of Political Issues Affecting Groups in Need

Political Group	Internal or External Attribution of Control	Compassionate Appeals Advantage
Disabled people	External	Democrats
Poor People	Internal	Democrats
Unborn children	External	Republicans
Women who have an abortion	Internal	Democrats
Death row defendants	Internal	Democrats
Sick people	External	Democrats
Undocumented immigrants	Internal	Democrats
Victims of gun violence	External	Democrats

Out of the political groups in need listed above, it seems that the Democratic Party will be incentivized to make appeals to compassion for most of them. Democrats ought to be more likely to appeal to compassion for the disabled, the poor, women who have an abortion, prisoners on death row, the sick, undocumented immigrants, and victims of gun violence. Moreover, of these groups, four could be considered to have some level of control over their plight: undocumented immigrants, prisoners on death row, women who have an abortion, and the poor. Thus, when Democrats appeal to compassion for these groups, they also likely focus on depicting these groups as not being fully responsible for their plights, in order to increase perceptions that they are worthy of compassion.

Democrats will be advantaged by appealing to compassion on behalf of these groups because the Democratic Party adheres to a liberal political philosophy. It espouses a belief that government ought to have a more expansive role in providing for the social welfare of citizens. Moreover, some of these policies affect social groups that are more likely to fall into the Democrats' political camp, such as the poor, racial minorities, and women. In order to win elections, the Democratic Party is more likely to

take policy stances that advantage their constituency groups.

In contrast, the Republican Party has a philosophy of a limited role for government. For many issues, Republican elites are opposed to greater government assistance. This constrains Republicans from appealing to compassion for policy positions that would be at odds with their beliefs. In fact, the Republican Party may have electoral incentives to deactivate people's compassion. Unlike Democrats, the Republican coalition does not rely on many of the groups affected by the policies outlined here. The poor, racial minorities and women are largely not in the Republican camp. Hence, Republicans will be less likely to use appeals to compassion for issues affecting these groups. In sum, because of their philosophy toward the appropriate role of government and because of their electoral incentives, I argue that Republicans are more likely to use messages that decrease the connection of compassion to politics, either by portraying recipients as undeserving or by highlighting other competing considerations.

As illustrated in Table 5, the Republican Party ought to only reap political benefits when using compassionate appeals regarding abortion policy. This is one area where appeals line up with Republican goals, in this case, more restrictive abortion policies. In addition, the unborn are not seen as in control or responsible for their circumstances. Hence, Republican elites will not need to override assumptions of control regarding this political issue.

In the following chapter, I examine the use of compassionate appeals by the major parties in the United States. I assume that politicians use compassionate language and portray others as worthy of compassion when it benefits them politically.

Consequently, I predict that Democratic elites use compassionate appeals more often, for more groups, and for groups that might be seen as responsible for their plights. In contrast, I predict that Republican elites are less likely to use compassionate appeals and are only likely to do so when it is a group whose plight is seen as outside of their control. Specifically, I investigate differences in the way the parties incorporate compassionate rhetoric in different policy domains and for different targets. My theory posits that party differences in compassionate rhetoric ought to shape how fellow partisans in the electorate connect their compassion to their political views.

Appendix A

Figure 1 Items:

How much sympathy and compassion do you have for homeless people?

Source: Knowing It By Heart: The Constitution & Its Meaning Survey

Field Dates: Jul 10, 2002 - Jul 24, 2002

Which of those would you personally say is more important in a political party--doing more to encourage personal responsibility, or having more compassion toward those in need?

Source: ABC News/Washington Post Poll

Field Dates: Mar 30, 2000 - Apr 2, 2000

When you hear about the deaths of civilians in Iraq, do you personally tend to feel upset, or more that their deaths are unfortunate but part of what war is all about?

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press/CFR Foreign Policy And Party Images Poll

Field Dates: Jul 8, 2004 - Jul 18, 2004

How much sympathy do you have for illegal immigrants and their families? Would you say you feel very sympathetic toward them, somewhat sympathetic, somewhat unsympathetic or very unsympathetic?

Source: CNN/ORC International Poll

Field Dates: Nov. 2014

Table 1 Items

Now I'm going to read you a list of personal characteristics or qualities that some people say are important in a leader and other people say are not important. For each, please tell me if this quality is important or not important to you. Compassionate...If Important, ask: Would you say it is absolutely essential, very important or just somewhat important that a leader be...compassionate?

Source: Pew Social Trends Poll

Field Dates: Jun 16, 2008 - Jul 16, 2008

How important is each of the following qualities in a candidate for president...compassion?

Source: Associated Press/GfK Knowledge Networks Poll

Field Dates: Mar, 2016

CHAPTER II

APPEALS TO COMPASSION IN POLITICAL RHETORIC

One of the most compelling reasons to study the political effects of compassion is that politicians regularly invoke compassion in their public speeches. This suggests that elites think compassion is an important political tool to influence the public. Yet there is reason to believe that the parties differ widely in their use of compassionate rhetoric. Why, for example, do Democrats in the electorate seem to think compassion is so much more important than Republicans do, despite not having a greater propensity to experience compassion?

If the parties do indeed diverge in the amount of language they use to evoke compassion, this ought to be consequential for mass political behavior. Although compassion is a hallmark of human nature, it may not always be a consistent feature of a political belief system. I argue that messages and arguments that highlight compassion regarding a political issue are important to making it relevant in guiding mass opinion.

In this chapter, I examine compassionate language used by elites, finding that the parties make reference to compassion differently. In some cases it is by directing compassion at different targets, and, in others cases, it is suggesting other priorities are more important than compassion. I explore political rhetoric in different arenas and by different types of political actors. In doing so, I seek to answer several questions. First, do the parties differ in their use of compassionate language? Specifically, I examine how often they appeal to compassion and for what policy areas. Second, do the parties differ in regards to the types of targets they appeal to compassion for? Here, I assess if

the parties differ in their likelihood of appealing to groups who are seen as more in control of their circumstances. The answers to these questions will help me answer a third question: namely, how does compassionate rhetoric affect the mass public? I examine this question specifically in my analysis of a large public opinion survey and in my experiments in the chapters that follow.

Compassionate Language as a Political Tool

Both parties deem many Americans to be in need but espouse distinct ideas about government solutions to alleviating their needs. These divisions should affect the messages leaders use about government policy and, potentially, the way they portray those in need. I contend that politicians are only likely to employ compassionate rhetoric when such a strategy might advantage them politically. As explained in Chapter 1, Democratic leaders ought to find compassionate appeals useful more often in forwarding their policy ends than Republican leaders do. This is because the Democratic Party espouses a more expansive role for government in helping those less well off. A more liberal orientation toward government likely leads Democratic leaders to adopt a wider definition of who is deserving of compassion and what role government ought to take in providing help. Many social welfare policies also affect groups that are more aligned with the Democratic coalition, such as the poor, racial minorities, and women, providing Democrats further electoral incentive to endorse policies for which compassionate rhetoric is applicable.

For Republicans, the reverse is true for social welfare issues. Republicans endorse a philosophy of limited government and do not have the same electoral

incentives that Democrats have. Hence, Republicans ought to be less likely to appeal to compassion regarding most of the policies I analyze here. The one issue in which I expect Republicans to emphasize compassion more than Democrats do is abortion. Compassion for unborn children seems a large component of pro-life rhetoric.

Related research buttresses these predictions. In two studies—an analysis of presidential advertisements from 1980 to 2012 and a study on the 2000 president debates—Democrats were much more likely to use language in line with George Lakoff’s (1996) Nurturant Parent frame and Republicans were more likely to use rhetoric in accordance with the Strict Father framework (Moses and Gonzales 2015; Cienki 2005). Under a Nurturant Parent vision, the federal government is tasked with meeting the needs of its citizens. In contrast, the Strict Father framework argues that social programs “coddle” people by making them, “morally weak, removing the need for self-discipline and willpower” (Lakoff 1996, 181). These studies find that Democratic leaders more frequently use language about meeting needs than Republican leaders do. Taken together, these findings further suggest that the Democratic Party uses more compassion-oriented rhetoric in their political speeches than the Republican Party does.

Overview of Analysis

I analyze three different types of political rhetoric. I use a combination of approaches because of their respective benefits and limitations for understanding compassionate appeals. First, I examine the speeches given by the major parties’ presidential candidates at the party conventions from 1996 to 2012. My reading of

presidential nomination acceptance speeches allows me to examine broad themes in the use of compassionate rhetoric by the major parties. The presidential nominee—in some cases the sitting president—is typically viewed as the de facto leader and spokesperson of the party. Contrasting the nominees' rhetoric is helpful in illuminating the parties' different orientations in connecting or not connecting compassion to politics.

However, nomination acceptance speeches are generally sweeping campaign speeches meant to endear candidates to the broader American public. As a result, candidates might refrain from using certain alternatives to compassionate rhetoric, such as portrayals of groups as unworthy of compassion. Moreover, presidential speeches generally focus on broad campaign themes, not on specific policy proposals. They are less able to elucidate, then, how the parties differ in their use of compassionate language in particular policy areas.

I therefore also analyze congressional floor debates to understand more about specific issue areas and about alternatives to compassionate rhetoric. These speeches allow me to look at the use of compassionate language when politicians debate legislation pertaining to a specific policy. Congressional floor speeches are part of the public record and thus a way for politicians to stake out positions and make their views known (Mayhew 1974). While people do not necessarily watch these speeches, the different frames that the parties use are transmitted to the public through the news media (e.g. Holian 2004). Thus these speeches are useful to how the parties differ in their political messaging when legislation is debated.

Finally, I also conduct an analysis of presidential rhetoric on health care to augment my analysis of congressional debates for this particular issue. I include

presidential speeches because of the relative importance of President Obama in leading the national debate about health care policy.

In my analysis of congressional rhetoric, I focus on five issue areas: food stamps, capital punishment, abortion, health care, and immigration. All these policy areas affect groups in need, thus providing the potential for elites to use compassionate language. I explore issues that have more than one potential target of compassion, including capital punishment (victims of crime vs. people on death row) and abortion (unborn children vs. women who have abortions), in order to understand how the parties talk about different groups potentially in need. Lastly, my motivation for choosing these specific issues was also pragmatic. Each has a policy preference item asked on the most recent iterations of the GSS, which is the survey that includes the questions I use to tap compassion.

How Elites Appeal to Compassion

To evoke compassion elites must portray others as being in need. Highlighting needs requires that politicians provide descriptions of the needs faced by certain individuals or groups. Such descriptions would suggest a person or group requires help and support. Second, elites must paint an individual or group as not fully to blame for their circumstances, and, hence, worthy of compassion. Elites should call attention to external causes of plights and the lack of fault of those in need of help. To use the term I use throughout, those seeking to “activate” compassion must convince people that the target group is low in internal *controllability*. Those who see a group or person as high in the controllability of their circumstances will not experience compassion. Indeed they

may experience anger. Because controllability is a central factor in experiencing compassion, I expect elites to highlight this for groups they are trying to appeal to compassion on behalf of.

For an issue for which only one of the major parties is advantaged by compassionate appeals, the other side may strategically seek to downplay associations people make between compassion and a given issue. Disputing the presence of needs is often a difficult case to make. Homeless people, for example, obviously need homes. Instead I expect that when elites have incentives to diminish the use of compassionate considerations they either, 1) draw attention to the blameworthiness of the recipients of help, or 2) make a non-compassion based appeal to other aspects of the policy. In the first case, political elites might reference individual choices that people have made, thereby painting them as undeserving of compassion and thus government help and support. For example, they might argue that people are homeless because they are drug abusers. In the second case, elites might ignore compassion, focusing instead on other considerations relevant to the policy area. For example, elites could argue the federal budget deficit is too large and that cuts need to be made to government programs.

Indirect versus direct targets

My analysis shows that politicians sometimes appeal to compassion for groups about whom the given policy proposal does not directly reference. In other words, there are direct and indirect targets of compassion. In Table 6, I classify groups as primary targets of compassion when a policy affects them directly. I classify as secondary targets groups for whom the policy is not specifically about but who might be affected by it. For example, when debating capital punishment, Republican elites at times appeal

to compassion for the victims of crimes committed by people on death row. I argue that this policy most directly affects the person being executed, while victims of capital crimes are only indirectly related to the policy. Similarly, immigrants are directly affected by immigration laws, while people who live in the same area as immigrants are not the primary objective of the policy. Regarding abortion policy, I classify both the unborn and women as primary targets of abortion policies, although advocates for either side might argue that one of them is more directly affected by the policy than the other.¹⁴

TABLE 6: Direct and Indirect Targets of Compassion

Policy Area	Direct Target of Policy	Indirect Target of Policy
Immigration	Undocumented immigrants	Others affected by immigration
Capital punishment	Death row inmates	Victims of crimes
Abortion	Unborn child; Pregnant women	None
Food stamps	The poor	None
Health care	The sick	None

Expectations About Compassionate Appeals

To summarize, Democrats ought to appeal to compassion more often and for more groups due to their different orientation toward government and different constituency bases. Many of the groups Democrats appeal to compassion on behalf of may also be viewed by some people as contributing to the causes of their needs. In contrast, I expect that Republicans will appeal less often to compassion in their

¹⁴Distinguishing between direct and indirect targets of compassion is important in order to understand how people subsequently connect compassion to a given policy preference. My survey analysis provides evidence that elite compassionate appeals are more effective when referring to more direct recipients rather than indirect recipients of compassionate policies.

messages, instead highlighting other considerations, such as the appropriate role of government or individual freedoms, or arguing that certain groups are unworthy of compassion.

Below, I outline my expectations for each policy area I examine in my content analysis of congressional speeches. I detail predictions for the type of compassionate appeals or alternative appeals party elites will make depending on the issue and its relevance to party goals. In addition, I predict whether or not each party will call attention to characteristics of the group in need in order to evoke or diminish compassionate considerations.

Help for the poor

Although the poor are almost by definition a group in need, the parties espouse different policy approaches to helping the poor. The divide in orientations toward government assistance to the poor should affect the degree to which party leaders use compassionate language and how they portray the poor in political speeches.

Democrats have favored a more expansive role for the government in alleviating poverty since at least FDR's New Deal. In my analysis of speeches, I expect that Democratic Party elites will use more compassionate language about the poor than Republican elites do.

Republicans advocate a more limited role of government, with more emphasis on help coming from outside of government, such as religious organizations, private charities, and individual communities. The Republican Party asserts it is not opposed to assisting the poor but is skeptical about the role of government in this realm (Gilens 1999). The notion of compassionate conservatism is built on helping those in need

through communities and faith-based organizations with a diminished role for the federal government (Olasky 2000). Because the nature of campaigning and political speeches is about how politicians in government will address problems, however, invoking the need for compassion in the private sector should be less common. Hence, Republican leaders likely do not call attention to compassion for the poor when debating public policy solutions in this area, because political speeches typically focus more on what government can do, rather than what private citizens and charities can do.

Controllability is particularly important for the poor. The poor can be perceived as either deserving or undeserving of compassion.¹⁵ These perceptions are informed by narratives about the poor coupled with external events, such as economic recessions or natural disasters. Because Democrats favor more liberal social welfare policies, I expect that they will make more appeals suggesting the relative lack of control of the poor regarding their experience of poverty. Democrats might do this by highlighting the attempts made by poor people to get out of poverty or by emphasizing external circumstances that contribute to poverty. In contrast, I expect Republicans to follow one of two strategies to disconnect people's compassion from their preferences about programs for the poor. First, I predict they will portray the poor as undeserving, by highlighting their control over their plight. Second, I predict that instead of appealing to compassion, Republicans will focus on other aspects of the policy, such as the inappropriate role of government in addressing needs.

¹⁵ For instance, early poor laws in the 18th and 19th century designated those who were able to work as undeserving of assistance and the elderly and disabled as deserving (Katz 1989).

Capital punishment

Differences in party platforms on the issue of capital punishment should also inform the use of compassionate rhetoric by the two parties. The Democratic Party has historically been more opposed to the death penalty than the Republican Party, although neither party is outspoken about being anti-capital punishment today. Still, when anti-death penalty arguments do appear, it is Democrats who tend to voice them because capital punishment is incompatible with a liberal interpretation of government as a Nurturant Parent (Lakoff 1996). For Democratic leaders who propose an end to the death penalty, then, I expect them to speak about it in terms of compassion about those being executed.

In contrast, the Republican Party has maintained a reputation as the party of law and order, taking a strong stance in favor of capital punishment. To conservatives, “If the very basis of morality is reward and punishment, then in a moral society the way to deal with crime is punishment, an eye for an eye—period. The argument that the death penalty does not deter murder doesn’t really matter that much” (Lakoff 1996, 209). Hence, Republican elites are unlikely to appeal to compassion for those on death row.

To receive a death sentence, a person must commit a heinous crime, such as murder. Thus, of all the groups I consider, death row defendants are likely the most difficult to evoke compassion for. Even making such appeals could be politically dangerous. Yet, while making such appeals to compassion might be difficult, they are not impossible. In sentencing hearings, for instance, mitigating circumstances are used to determine whether someone deserves the death penalty or instead a life sentence.

Even so, such justifications require complexity at a level party elites may not want to engage in. Hence, I expect Democratic Party elites who are opposed to the death penalty either to 1) appeal to compassion broadly, without focusing on the deservingness of those who have committed the crimes or to 2) draw attention to the possibility of wrongly condemning a person to death. Pointing to those on death row who have been wrongfully convicted is a way to shift considerations from the internal faults of the perpetrator to the external circumstances that have to do with the criminal justice system. People wrongfully sentenced are particularly deserving of compassion because they have received a death sentence through no fault of their own. Hence, arguments against the death penalty ought to emphasize innocent, and thus blameless, defendants, providing critiques of the legal system. Such arguments might also draw attention to the racial bias inherent in our criminal justice system.

Since Republicans favor the death penalty, Republican politicians are more likely to draw attention to the negative attributes of the offenders on death row in order to paint them as undeserving of compassion. In highlighting the heinousness of their crimes, elites can indicate that such individuals are unworthy of compassion and deserve to be executed. Indeed, they might argue instead that it is the victims of crimes committed by people on death row that ought to be targets of compassion. If Republican elites use compassionate language at all, it is likely to be directed toward the victims.

Health Care

Those without health insurance constitute another group in need. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation (2015,1), the uninsured are, “less likely to receive

preventive care, are more likely to be hospitalized for conditions that could have been prevented, and are more likely to die in the hospital than those with insurance...The financial impact also can [also] be severe.” Proposals to expand coverage for the uninsured provide an opportunity for elites to use compassionate rhetoric. Since FDR’s presidency, the Democratic Party has favored expanded government healthcare. The Republican Party has generally opposed the Democrats’ health care policy proposals. Ideology tends to be at the core of its opposition. Health care makes up such a large part of the economy that government involvement in this sector would increase government’s size dramatically.

I expect that only Democrats will try to evoke compassion when talking about health care public policy. Republicans are opposed to the Affordable Care Act specifically, which is the subject of the debates in the years I analyze. Republicans are less likely to evoke compassion in this area, then, because such a strategy would be not be advantageous to their preferred political outcome of less government involvement in health care.

Health care is unique among social welfare policies. Unlike being poor, being sick is perceived as outside of one’s control. Recent work demonstrates that people automatically think that assistance to the sick is a worthy cause, while assistance to the poor is more contingent on whether or not people perceive others to have contributed to their circumstances (Jensen and Petersen 2016). Thus Democrats ought to highlight the lack of control inherent in illness in their efforts to evoke compassion. Similarly, Republicans are unlikely to depict the sick as undeserving of compassion. I do not expect that they will use rhetoric that blames people who are in need of health care.

Instead, I expect that Republican leaders emphasize other considerations apart from compassion, such as their commitment to a limited role for government, in their opposition to the ACA.

Abortion

Both parties likely attempt to use compassionate language for strategic purposes on abortion. The targets of compassion, however, ought to differ. Because the Republican Party is pro-life, its leaders likely appeal to compassion for the unborn child. Because the Democratic Party supports access to abortion, their elites will not want to talk about unborn babies at all. This is not to say that compassionate language might not be helpful for Democrats. It could be useful to portray women seeking an abortion as people in need. In turn, I expect that Democrats do not mention the unborn child in their messages and that Republicans do not mention women who have abortions in their messages.

Additionally, women who have abortions could be portrayed in different ways to be seen as more or less deserving. I expect that, when appealing to compassion, Democrats will emphasize circumstances, such as rape, that lead to pregnancy through no individual control. For Republicans, using compassionate rhetoric about a baby is not complicated. A baby would clearly be considered a vulnerable recipient of compassion who has no control over its fate, and Republicans likely highlight this in their appeals to compassion.

Immigration

Immigration policy debates are similar to assistance to the poor in that they involve a group—undocumented immigrants—who can be portrayed as either worthy or

unworthy of compassion. Liberals tend to view undocumented immigrants as, “powerless people with no immoral intent [and] innocent children needing nurturance” (Lakoff 1996, 188). Thus Democratic Party elites are likely to appeal to compassion for undocumented immigrants and their families. They also may highlight circumstances that lead people to immigrate, such as fleeing unsafe living conditions, in order to decrease perceptions of blame and increase the chance that people feel compassion for them.

Most Republicans, on the other hand, favor stricter immigration policies. Conservatives are more inclined to view undocumented immigrants as, “lawbreakers who should be punished” (Lakoff 1996, 187). Hence, Republican elites are unlikely to appeal to compassion for immigrants, and, in turn, are likely to draw attention to the control immigrants have over their circumstances. For example, Republicans might allude to undocumented immigrants deciding to immigrate without going through the legal process, emphasizing that their actions constitute a decision to break U.S. laws.

Since my analysis focuses on the Dream Act specifically, however, I do not expect Republicans to use rhetoric to portray undocumented children as having chosen to immigrate illegally. Instead of directly trying to suppress compassion for undocumented minors, I predict Republican elites will highlight other considerations related to the policy, such as law and order and fear of crime.

Content Analysis Methodology

To assess how often and in what ways political elites use compassionate language, I analyze presidential nomination acceptance speeches and congressional

debates, supplementing these with presidential speeches for the issue of health care. I quantify the use of compassionate language by the parties by tallying up the number of speeches that use compassionate appeals for a given policy. I also record who the targets of compassion are as well as other prominent themes in the speeches.

My coding methodology follows directly from the definition of compassion: “concern for others in need and a desire to see others’ welfare improved.” Instead of a search for the number of words that might be associated with compassion, I read through each speech to document descriptions of those in need and calls for compassion. I do this, in part, because some of the words associated with compassion can be used to mean things other than compassion. In addition, by conducting a more in-depth analysis, I can note the alternative themes elites use. I code compassionate rhetoric as that which describes describing suffering or unmet needs. Because these judgments can be subjective, I have highlighted a few examples below to provide an illustration of the process.

In my analysis of capital punishment debates, when Senator Russ Feingold (D) stated his opposition to the death penalty due to, “the flaws in our criminal justice system” I do not count that as a reference to compassion. Here, Senator Feingold alluded to an unfair criminal justice system, but he did not specifically mention concern for those who were harmed by it. In contrast, I count as a compassionate appeal a statement by Senator Frank Lautenberg (D) that he believes the death penalty is, “ineffective, cruel, and unjust.” In this case, the use of the word “cruel” in his rhetoric describes suffering. Calling attention to suffering adheres to the definition of compassion of concern for others in need. Language such as this could evoke concern

for those on death row.

Another example is found in rhetoric about paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. When Representative Adam Schiff (D) asserts, “The DREAM Act...will make our economy, military, and Nation stronger,” he does not evoke compassion but instead argues that the policy proposal will help the U.S. economy. His statement makes no reference to immigrants themselves or what conditions they might be escaping in coming to the U.S. Thus, it is not counted as an appeal to compassion. In contrast, I code Senator Dick Durbin’s (D) description as an example of compassionate language when he said, “Children, brought to America without a vote in the process...Many of them have never seen and don’t know the country they came from. This is their country. But because they were brought here not in legal status, undocumented, they have nowhere to turn.” Here, Senator Durbin is describing people in need and is also drawing attention to their lack of choice in the matter of immigrating. Such language ought to evoke compassion for undocumented immigrants.

Speeches in the analysis

First, I examine all presidential nomination acceptance speeches from both major parties from 1996 through 2012. For each speech, I record the total number of times candidates appealed to helping those in need. I also note the number of times elites make reference to actors outside of government as useful in providing assistance. Second, I examine 212 speeches by members of Congress, divided by each issue in my analysis. For each issue area, I conduct separate searches of the congressional record using Congress.gov, which includes speeches in both the House of Representatives and

the Senate. The search results are sorted by relevance, and I select the speeches from the order that they appear. I search the title and bill number of the specific legislation, or, when none had been debated in recent years, I search terms specific to the given policy. Below, I outline my specific search criteria for each issue area.

For each issue area, I calculate the total number of speeches that incorporates a reference to compassion for each of the parties. Beyond coding for compassionate language, I track alternative rhetorical themes in order to better understand the strategies used by parties when appeals to compassion are not politically practical. Thus, for each speech, I document four different aspects: who the speaker is, what party the speaker belongs to, whether or not compassionate appeals are used, and what alternative themes are addressed.

To analyze political rhetoric about assistance to the poor, I examine congressional debates about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps. For abortion, I first analyzed the debates surrounding the most recent major legislation about abortion—the partial birth abortion ban. Because this specific bill elicited distinct rhetoric from other speeches about abortion, however, I widened my search to include all speeches about abortion from 2009 to 2012. For immigration policy, I analyze congressional debate about a version of the Dream Act when it was debated in 2009 and 2010. For my analysis of health care, I also analyze congressional debates about the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, commonly known as the ACA, when it was debated in 2009 and 2010. For my analysis of capital punishment, I conduct a general search in the congressional record for rhetoric about that topic since the year 2000, using the search terms “death penalty,” and, “capital

punishment.”¹⁶ All these speeches take place in the time period during or prior to the range of years I analyze through surveys.

In addition to these speeches, recall that I also include presidential speeches to examine the frames used by President Obama in leading the national health care debate. I examine all quotations from President Obama in *USA Today* beginning with the introduction of the ACA in September 2009 through its signing on March 23th, 2010.¹⁷ I chose *USA Today* because of its reputation of being nonpartisan and because of its relatively wide circulation.

Results

Presidential nomination acceptance speeches

My analysis of presidential candidate speeches reveals that politicians talk about compassion frequently. They often draw attention to struggles in society in order to highlight how government or changes to government policies might help. Yet even in these campaign speeches to the American electorate, I find that Democratic candidates use compassionate rhetoric more often than Republican candidates do. I also find that Republican presidential candidates are more likely than Democratic candidates to emphasize the importance of solutions other than government in meeting the needs of citizens.

Table 7 illustrates the use of compassionate language by the nominees for

¹⁶I conduct my search as far as back as 2000 in order to get a large enough sample of speeches, because that was the last time capital punishment was debated to any degree.

¹⁷I do not examine President Obama’s speeches about health care directly because I assumed many of them contain a great deal of similar language. The transmission of his message through the media seemed to be a better avenue to understanding the different types of appeals he made throughout his campaign for the bill’s passage.

president in every presidential election year since 1996. It also shows the number of times elites make reference to the importance or benefits of actors besides government providing help to those in need. In the bottom two rows, I add up the total amount of compassionate language and references to non-governmental actors and provide the totals for each party.

TABLE 7 Nomination Acceptance Speeches

Year	Democrats		Republicans	
	Total Compassionate Rhetoric	Non-Government Actors Should Provide Assistance	Total Compassionate Rhetoric	Non-Government Actors Should Provide Assistance
1996	19	4	14	2
2000	30	3	19	9
2004	21	0	22	2
2008	22	1	6	2
2012	28	2	7	4
Total	<i>120</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>19</i>

The first thing to note is that Democratic nominees have used more compassionate appeals than Republicans in every year except for 2004, and that year Bush’s and Kerry’s use of such appeals was nearly equal. The partisan divide was particularly large in 2008 and in 2012. Barack Obama made 22 and 28 appeals to helping others in need in those years, compared to just 6 by John McCain and 7 by Mitt Romney. Obama’s use of such rhetoric was sometimes very directly compassionate. In 2008, for example, Obama said, “We are more compassionate than a government that lets...families slide into poverty,” and, “We are more compassionate than a government that lets veterans sleep on our streets.” Overall, Democrats referenced helping others in need 120 times compared to 68 times by Republicans.

Al Gore used the most compassionate language of any candidate for president. In

his nomination acceptance speech in 2000, he called for compassion regarding gun violence, saying, “Tipper and I went to Columbine High School after the tragedy there, and we embraced families of the children who were lost. And I will never forget the words of the father who whispered into my ear, ‘Promise me that these children will not have died in vain.’” Here, Gore called attention to the pain and suffering experienced by families who lost children to gun violence in his argument for stricter gun control. Gore also called for compassion for the disabled, describing someone, “who suffered from a medical mistake during childbirth and needs full time nursing care for several years.”

The highest number of compassionate appeals by a Republican in the analysis was made by George W. Bush, making 22 references to helping others in need in his 2004 speech. This is in accordance with Bush’s self-description of being a compassionate conservative. Bush called for compassion for military families saying, “I have returned the salute of wounded soldiers, some with a very tough road ahead, who say they were just doing their job. I’ve held the children of the fallen, who are told their dad or mom is a hero...parents and wives and husbands who have received a folded flag and said a final goodbye to a soldier they loved.” This is compassionate language because it emphasizes the plight of those in need, in this case soldiers and their families. Bush also called for compassion for the unborn, saying, “Because a caring society will value its weakest members, we must make a place for the unborn child.” Here, Bush drew attention to the vulnerability of an unborn child and called upon society to be caring. That year, John Kerry spent much of his speech talking about why the Iraq War was wrong and how to fix it. Even so, Kerry still used compassionate language 21 times in

his speech, such as remarking that, “the story of people struggling for health care is the story of so many Americans.” This was compassionate language in the use of the term, “struggling” depicting those without insurance as being in need of help. In fact, one of his main slogans was, “Help is on the way!”

In addition, Republican elites frequently made arguments about the role of actors outside of government to provide help and assistance. These alternate actors included families, communities, churches, charities, and private organizations. Across the time series, Republican candidates made such arguments 19 times, compared to 10 by Democrats. In 2000, this was a hallmark of Bush’s proposed compassionate conservatism. He argued that, “Big government is not the answer. But the alternative to bureaucracy is not indifference.” Bush pledged to, “...support the heroic work of homeless shelters and hospices, food pantries and crisis pregnancy centers—people reclaiming their communities block-by-block and heart-by-heart.” Similarly in 2004, Bush remarked on the essential role of religious groups in aiding the poor, saying, “Because religious charities provide a safety net of mercy and compassion, our government must never discriminate against them.” In 2012, Romney continued the argument about the limited effectiveness of government in providing solutions, saying that, “All the laws and legislation in the world will never heal this world like the loving hearts and arms of mothers and fathers....love of their family—and God’s love.”

Although Democrats were more likely to emphasize governmental solutions, they at times combined appeals to compassion with calls for personal responsibility. From this small sample of speeches, it appears that Democrats made these arguments more often in the 1990s and in 2000. They made fewer such references in recent years.

For example, Bill Clinton stated that, “the government can only do so much.” Similarly, Al Gore asserted that, “laws and programs by themselves will never be enough. All of us, and especially all parents need to take more responsibility.”¹⁸

The fact that Republican presidential candidates, as leaders of their party, make strong arguments in favor of outside assistance to helping those in need is important to understanding how people connect compassion to their views about assistance in the private realm. In my survey analysis next chapter, I am able to compare preferences about government assistance to the poor with charitable giving and volunteering.

In sum, my reading of nomination acceptance speeches indicates that Democrats use compassionate appeals more often than Republicans do. Both parties likely want to appear compassionate, or at least not uncompassionate, particularly when they are attempting to appeal to a broad swath of voters. In that light, it is interesting to note the drop off in compassionate appeals by the Republican Party in 2008 and 2012. In the end, these speeches only provide a suggestion as to what types of policies—and thus groups—the parties appeal to compassion on behalf of. Congressional floor debates might better address these concerns, and I turn to my examination of those speeches next.

Congressional floor debates

My analysis of congressional rhetoric uncovers even more evidence that Democratic elected leaders appeal to compassion more frequently than Republican

¹⁸I also discovered a divide in the parties’ nominees in describing themselves as compassionate. Obama, Kerry, and Gore all made remarks about themselves being compassionate. The Republican nominees did not, but instead drew attention to the compassionate natures of their spouses (in the case of John McCain and George W. Bush in 2004), their running mates (Romney), and their fathers (George W. Bush in 2000). This suggests perhaps that Democratic leaders are more concerned with appearing compassionate to voters.

leaders do. In the analysis below, I show that Democratic members of Congress were much more likely than Republican members to use compassionate language when debating food stamps, capital punishment, immigration, and health care. As with the presidential speeches, Republicans were only more likely to invoke compassion when debating abortion policy. I also find that Democrats make appeals to compassion for more “complex” beneficiaries of government policy than the Republican Party does. Specifically, many of the compassionate appeals Democrats made were for groups who may be perceived by many as contributing to their own plights. My analysis also uncovers that, when a party’s policy position on an issue is at odds with an appeal to compassion, party elites either tend to portray the beneficiary of compassion as undeserving of help or to focus their message on considerations other than compassion. Notably, a common alternate theme to compassion was to focus on individual rights as a counterpoint to concern for others in need.

To analyze the use of compassion in different issue areas by members of Congress, I examine speeches from each issue area. Table 8 illustrates the total number of speeches with a compassionate appeal made by each party, categorized by issue area. In the table, I provide the number of speeches by party in the congressional record in each issue area, and I provide the number of the speeches that contained compassionate rhetoric. These entries make clear that the parties debated some issues more than others. For several of the issues, Republicans made very few speeches at all. Hence, if they made even one compassionate appeal, the percentage of compassionate appeals might appear relatively high. Democrats made many fewer speeches about abortion than Republicans did, giving the appearance that they appealed to compassion a great deal.

To provide a clearer indication of the incidence of compassionate appeals across party lines, I also present each party's use of compassionate rhetoric in comparison to the total number of compassionate appeals that were made in the last two columns. Finally, in Table 9, I outline the alternative themes elected officials emphasize when they do not appeal to compassion.

CHAPTER TWO: APPEALS TO COMPASSION IN POLITICAL RHETORIC

TABLE 8 Percentage of Speeches that Includes Compassionate Rhetoric

Policy Area	Democratic Speeches			Republican Speeches			Percentage of All Appeals to Compassion	
	Number of Speeches	Number of Speeches with Compassionate Rhetoric	Percentage of Speeches with Compassionate Rhetoric	Number of Speeches	Number of Speeches with Compassionate Rhetoric	Percentage of Speeches with Compassionate Rhetoric	Democratic Speeches	Republican Speeches
Food Stamps	42	39	93	7	3	43	93%	7%
Capital Punishment	23	16	70	6	4	67	80%	20%
Immigration	20	13	65	7	2	14	87%	13%
Health Care (Congress)	39	24	62	32	3	9	89%	11%
Health Care (Obama)	87	4	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	N/A
Abortion	13	5	31	21	12	57	29%	71%

TABLE 9 Prevalent Alternative Themes to Compassionate Rhetoric

Policy	Alternate Themes to Compassion
Food stamps	Recipients are undeserving
Capital punishment	Recipients are undeserving
Abortion	Women’s rights (individual rights)
Health care	Government encroachment; individual freedoms
Immigration	Crime and security concerns; rule of law; appeals to fear

Food stamps

Turning first to the issue of government food assistance, many more Democrats made speeches about food stamps than Republicans did. Moreover, a higher percentage of the Democrats’ speeches about the issue included an appeal to compassion, 93 percent, compared to 43 percent for Republicans. In all, members of both parties combined for 42 speeches on food stamps that appealed to compassion. Fully 39 of them (93 percent) were made by Democrats, compared to 7 percent by Republicans. Clearly, the major theme of Democrats’ speeches about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was compassion, such as when Representative Jim McGovern implored, “Mr. Chair, let us stay true to our values of compassion and decency and justice.”¹⁹ Democratic Representative Rosa Delauro also appealed to compassion, saying, “...If you vote for this bill, you will have to look them in the eye and tell them

¹⁹ McGovern also reacted against a proposal for non-governmental solutions, saying, “We’re told by my friends on the other side of the aisle, well, don’t worry, all the faith-based groups will take care of everything; that’s what they’re all there for. Well, talk to any leader in any faith-based community in this country, and they will tell you that they are working overtime right now to try to provide for the struggling families in their communities.”

to go without food, that they have to endure hunger because we had to give more handouts to millionaires and to billionaires.”

When appealing to compassion, Democrats brought attention to external circumstances that caused people to need government assistance. This allowed them to portray SNAP recipients as deserving of compassion and help. According to Representative Kurt Schrader, “People struggle. They try and keep their job, they go into savings, they rely on friends; and then after several years, they lose their house, maybe they’ve already lost their job, and then they need food stamps...But in the real world this was a horrible recession, the worst recession since the Great Depression, and you don’t balance that budget on the backs of these kids.” Barbara Lee, a Democrat from California, pointed to the deservingness of recipients by saying, “These cuts to the SNAP program are really heartless. Let me tell you that I know from personal experience that the majority of people on food stamps wants a job that pays a living wage, and SNAP provides this bridge over troubled waters during very difficult times.” At the same time, Democrats also tended to blame the rich and powerful. They argued that subsidies were given to wealthier industries while cuts were made to the neediest. Representative DeLaura questioned why we would cut government funding for, “...women, infants, and children and nutrition programs? ---Let’s start with tax subsidies for the richest people in this country and with the special interests of this Nation.”

Republicans did not talk as much about the issue of food stamps. But, when they did, they used two alternatives to compassionate rhetoric. They either portrayed recipients of food assistance as undeserving or they argued for non-governmental

solutions. Illustrative of this approach, Representative Steve King said, “We don’t want to hand out to these people that are gaming the system, so to speak,” and Representative Ted Yoho argued that denying funding, “will not remove one calorie off anyone’s plate that deserves it or requires this assistance.” In arguing that non-governmental actors could fill the need, Representative Cynthia Lummis asserted, “There are county food programs. There are city food programs. There are religious organization food programs. There is the Salvation Army—501(c)(3)-type programs— neighborhood programs, Meals on Wheels programs, food banks.”

In sum, Democrats appealed more to compassion for the poor than Republicans did. In addition, they portrayed potential recipients of aid as deserving. When the Republican Party talked about the issues they tended to focus on the undeservingness of the recipients. These different approaches ought to affect how mass partisans consider the issue of government assistance to the poor. In my survey analysis in the next chapter, Democratic identifiers ought to be more likely to connect compassion to their policy preferences than Republican identifiers. That is, among Democrats, there ought to be a split between how much high and low compassion individuals support government aid for the poor. In contrast, compassion should not explain differences in policy preferences on government aid to the poor among Republican identifiers.

Capital punishment

Roughly similar percentages of the parties’ speeches about capital punishment included compassionate appeals—about 70 percent of each party’s totals speeches. Yet Democrats made many more speeches about capital punishment in the years I looked at (23) than Republicans (6). I find, then, that the bulk of compassionate appeals made by

both parties about this issue were made by Democrats, at 80 percent. And, as expected, the parties appealed to compassion for different targets.

As for the objects of compassion, Democrats referenced people on death row, pointing to instances when innocent people had been wrongfully convicted. In emphasizing the plight of the innocent, Democrats such as Representative Holt argued that only by abolishing the death penalty could we, “eliminate the possibility of putting to death an innocent human being.” Likewise, Democrat Patrick Leahy asked, “Can you imagine how any one of us would feel, day after day for 12 years, never knowing if we were just a few hours or a few days from execution, locked up on death row for a crime we did not commit?”

Democrats’ appeals to compassion also had to do with the nuts and bolts of the execution. Democrats described the process as cruel, as Representative Danny Davis stated: “The revelations of torture, including electric shock, suffocation, burning, beating, and Russian roulette have been widely reported...” Similarly, Representative John Lewis asked, “How long will we continue to travel down this inhumane road?” Democrats did not use compassionate appeals about the victims of the crimes and rarely mentioned the crimes that were committed in capital punishment cases.

In contrast, Republicans, who favor the status quo on this issue, were much less likely to make speeches about capital punishment. When they did take to the floor, Republican elites emphasized the negative characteristics of death row inmates. Most of the Republican speeches incorporated detailed descriptions of the crimes committed by death row inmates, some as heinous as the rape and murder of a child. Compassion was not absent from their speeches, but they appealed to compassion for the victims of the

crimes committed by those who were sentenced to execution. Emblematic was Republican Representative Ted Poe's lament: "Maybe...someday judges will treat victims with the same concern and compassion that they treat barbarians."

In sum, Democrats made more frequent appeals to compassion about the death penalty, focusing on people on death row. They also emphasized the plight of the wrongfully convicted, thereby attaching an element of deservingness to a group who many people may not perceive as worthy of compassion. Republicans, in contrast, emphasized that people who committed capital crimes were unworthy of compassion. Instead they appealed to compassion for the victims of crimes. Because the victims are indirectly related to the policy at hand, however, I expect that such appeals will be less effective at connecting compassion to policy preferences. Consequently, I predict that Democratic identifiers' views will be organized around their propensities toward compassion on this issue, while Republican identifiers' views largely will not be.

Immigration

In the selection of speeches about the Dream Act in the 111th Congress, the majority (65 percent) of Democrats' speeches contained a compassionate appeal. Due to the nature of the legislation, their appeals focused on compassion for undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children. For instance, Representative Mike Quigley avowed his "support of our Nation's children and young adults, children who, sadly, have borne the brunt of our immigration issues; children who have graduated from high school and want to continue on to college, but cannot receive any help; children who would sign up and fight and die for our country, but are seen as ghosts by their host country."

In conjunction with appealing to compassion, Democratic elites also emphasized the lack of control of those who immigrated as children. For example, Senator Dick Durbin remarked, “This young woman did nothing wrong...And now her life was in shambles.” Similarly, Representative Yvette Clark argued that undocumented immigrants who came as children were, “facing the threat of deportation to a country they have never known...We cannot continue to punish a community of young people that came to this country at no fault of their own.” Thus, Democrats appealed to compassion for undocumented immigrants who immigrated as children by appealing both to their need for safety and security and by highlighting the lack of control they had in the decision to immigrate.

Republicans on the other hand, largely did not appeal to compassion when debating immigration policy. Out of the relatively small number of speeches about the topic (7), Republicans only appealed to compassion twice—once for children of undocumented immigrants and once for people who were victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants. Republican members of Congress instead tended to frame immigration as a law and order issue. In some instances, they also depicted undocumented immigrants as dangerous criminals. For example, Senator Jeff Sessions warned that, “The DREAM Act altogether ignores the lessons of 9/11, going so far as to open up eligibility to those who previously defrauded immigration authorities, provided false documentation, as did many of the 9/11 hijackers on their visa applications.” Senator Orrin Hatch raised similar concerns, saying, “Now more than ever, our Nation’s porous border is flowing over with increasingly violent crimes—fueled by drugs, gangs and even human trafficking. Unfortunately, this chaos is spilling into our

communities.... I remain understanding about individuals who, through no fault of their own, were brought to this country for a better life. However, the urgent challenges facing our country must take priority.” Here, Senator Hatch engaged in a more complex argument about immigration policy, potentially expressing some sympathy for undocumented immigrants who came as minors but arguing that security trumps such concerns. Overall, however, the theme of law-breaking dominated Republicans’ messages about immigration policy.

Because Republicans framed the immigration debate as a matter of law and order, Republican identifiers ought to structure their preferences around these considerations, rather than compassion. In contrast, Democratic Party identifiers’ compassion should be connected to their immigration policy preferences because Democratic leaders have largely highlighted compassionate considerations regarding undocumented immigrants and made clear that they are deserving of compassion.

Health care

Congressional debates about health care policy followed similar patterns to those about food assistance and immigration. Democrats appealed to compassion frequently while Republicans did not. Out of all Democratic speeches about health care, 62 percent included compassionate rhetoric, while only 9 percent of Republican speeches did. When appealing to compassion for providing health care, Speaker Nancy Pelosi stressed, “It’s personal to the family that was refused coverage because their child had a preexisting condition, no coverage, the child got worse, sicker...It’s personal for 45,000 Americans and families who have lost a loved one each year because they didn’t and couldn’t get health insurance.” Representative Moran also appealed to compassion in

arguing for passage of the ACA, saying, “We know that we can reduce the suffering of our people, while lengthening and bettering their lives. And because we know this, we have a responsibility to change it.” In their speeches, Democrats also drew attention to issues of controllability in order to increase compassion. For example, Representative Sanchez stated, “No child asks to be born with muscular dystrophy, juvenile diabetes, asthma, or Down Syndrome.” Democrats not only argued that people were in need of health insurance, but also that those individuals were deserving of compassion.

As they did in the debates over SNAP funding, Democrats contrasted benefits that the rich and powerful receive to what the vulnerable receive, in this case blaming insurance companies. For instance, Democratic Representative Nick Rahall said, “so many health insurance companies have been increasingly putting high profit margins above all else, even the compassionate treatment of the sick and the elderly.”

In their speeches about the ACA, Republicans who opposed the measure clearly did not talk about people in need of health care because they needed to cite reasons for their opposition. They focused primarily on government encroachment. Representative Paul Broun bemoaned the Affordable Care Act’s “intrusion into people’s lives,” and proposed a health savings account that would give people “ownership.” Similarly, Representative Eric Cantor argued that, “we believe that families and patients should have the freedom and the right to choose the doctors they want.” These arguments frame the bill as antithetical to conservative principles of smaller government and greater individual freedoms.

I supplemented my analysis on this issue with speeches made by President Obama about the issue. Unlike his party’s members of Congress, he primarily focused

on the specifics of the health care policy, rather than appealing to compassion for those in need of health insurance. This was contrary to expectation, as Obama frequently appealed to compassion in his presidential campaign speeches. During the period when he was promoting the ACA, however, President Obama took a more pragmatic approach to winning over opponents to the legislation. In early September 2009, Obama remarked, “Because of the cost-savings measures that we're putting in place--for example, making sure that prevention and wellness is covered--we're actually going to reduce the costs of health care overall over the long term.” Here, Obama was not appealing to compassion but instead talking about the efficiency of the program in reducing overall costs.

Hence, the analysis of elite rhetoric about health care leads to a mixed prediction for mass partisans, at least among Democrats. Republican elites framed health care as an issue about individual freedoms and the size of government. Hence, compassion ought not to have a major role in Republican identifier's health care policy preferences. For Democrats, compassionate rhetoric was common in Democratic congressional speeches, but the president steered away from compassionate language in his promotion of the bill. The sick constitute a group in need who are predominantly viewed as not in control of their circumstances, which should make it relatively easy to evoke compassion for them. Perhaps even the relative lack of such framing by the leader of the party will not diminish the effect of compassionate considerations made relevant by congressional leaders. Overall, it seems likely that compassion will play a larger role in explaining the policy preferences for Democratic identifiers than for Republican identifiers.

Abortion

Turning to speeches about abortion policy, I again found a large partisan gap in the use of compassionate rhetoric, but, this time, Republicans were much more likely to use compassionate language than Democrats were. Republicans also made more speeches about abortion than Democrats did, 21 compared to 13. Out of all appeals to compassion that were made by both parties regarding abortion policy, 71 percent of them were made by Republicans. Republicans regularly appealed to compassion for unborn children. For instance, Republican Representative Chris Smith emphasized, “The lives of young children who are truly the most unprotected class of individuals in our society are under assault...We have a duty to protect the weakest and the most vulnerable from violence.” Representative Roscoe Bartlett drew further attention to the vulnerability of the unborn by saying, “...this is the picture of a baby in the womb. It is clearly smiling. It is clearly a human being.” In their support of the partial birth abortion ban, Republicans also frequently appealed to disgust. For instance, Representative Rob Bishop described it as a, “heinous process,” and, according to Representative Michael Burgess, “the procedure is repulsive...” Yet overall Republican rhetoric about abortion seemed aimed at evoking concern for the unborn and calling for protection of human life.

Democrats did not discuss the unborn child at all in their speeches, but they also did not frequently appeal to compassion for women as I had predicted. Instead, Democrats primarily focused on the issue of individual rights, in this case, women’s rights specifically. For instance, for Democrat Lynn Woolsey, “This debate is really about limiting a woman’s right to privacy and restricting access to constitutionally

protected medical procedures.” Representative Lois Capps stated her opposition to, “eroding a woman's legitimate access to a legal medical procedure,” and Representative Louise Slaughter protested, “targeting a woman’s right to privacy.” These examples highlight the use of language meant to evoke a call for equal rights but not to appealing to concern or compassion for women in need.

In general, the Democrats’ framing seems ill-suited to evoke compassion for policy preferences about abortion. Instead, Democratic identifiers may associate the issue more with considerations about individual rights. The Republicans’ framing, however, was centered on compassionate considerations for the unborn child, an object that party identifiers would deem worthy of compassion. Thus, I predict that in my survey analysis Republican identifiers’ abortion policy preferences will be informed more by their compassion than Democratic identifiers will.

Conclusion

My analysis of congressional and presidential candidate speeches provides evidence suggesting several important differences in the way political leaders appeal to compassion. First, Democratic leaders used more compassionate language than Republican leaders did for all of the issues examined here except for abortion policy. Democrats also regularly appealed to compassion for more “complex” groups—that is, groups that could be portrayed as somewhat responsible for their plights. This included such groups as the poor, undocumented immigrants, and death row inmates. Republicans only appealed to compassion for groups who were largely seen as having had no control over their plight. This included the unborn and victims of violent crimes

committed by people on death row.

These different frames should influence how party identifiers in the public connect their own propensity for experiencing compassion to their political preferences about issues involving those in need. Based on the results of this analysis, I expect individual differences in compassion to be consistent predictors on the political views of Democratic identifiers but not for Republican identifiers. The reverse pattern ought to hold for preferences about abortion. Yet for non-political attitudes, I expect compassion to have similar effects on partisans in the public, since they have not been exposed to contrasting partisan themes that would alter how relevant they found compassion to be in the private realm. In fact, the rhetoric of Republican presidential candidates suggests that compassion might play an even larger role for Republican identifiers' preferences about helping others through non-governmental means.

CHAPTER III

COMPASSION AND PUBLIC OPINION

Thus far I have illustrated that Democratic political leaders employ more rhetoric that centers around compassion for many social welfare issues, while Republican leaders employ more compassionate rhetoric on the issue of abortion. My content analysis of congressional and presidential candidate speeches also found that Democratic elites appealed to compassion for more “complex” targets of compassion, that is, groups that some may deem as having contributed to their own plights. These included such groups as the poor, undocumented immigrants, and death row convicts. Republican elites only appealed to compassion for “simple” targets, that is, groups that are almost universally considered not to have contributed to their needs. These included victims of capital crimes, victims of violence committed by undocumented immigrants, and the unborn. However, of these three, only one was directly connected to the policy at hand: the unborn. These differences in elite rhetoric ought to have consequences for public opinion.

My theory suggests that partisans will connect compassion to politics under two conditions: 1) when elites have used compassionate language, and 2) when they view the recipients as deserving of compassion. When compassion has been linked to politics, significant differences on policy preferences ought to emerge between those with low and high compassion for those policies which their party’s leaders have emphasized compassion and recipients’ deservingness. For Democrats, these include government assistance to the poor, capital punishment, health care, and immigration.

For Republicans, I expect to find no such differences in preferences about these policies between those who have a high or low propensity toward compassion. Republicans do not talk about these issues in compassionate terms and at times denigrate potential recipients of government aid. Yet more compassionate Republicans ought to have more pro-life policy preferences than less compassionate Republicans, because Republican elites do use compassionate language in this realm and portray the unborn as worthy of sympathy.

In this chapter, I use four waves of the General Social Survey to test how compassion manifests itself in Americans' policy preferences depending on their party affiliation. I find evidence suggesting that the manner in which elites talk about compassion and how often they do it affects how compassion guides the opinions of ordinary Americans. In an effort to strengthen my theory, I also find it useful to examine compassion's effect on non-political preferences. These items provide a couple helpful points of contrast with political preferences. In the case of non-government help for those in need, compassion ought to have effects based on my definition of compassion, regardless of political messages highlighting people in need. In this way, its effect ought to be less contingent than in the political world. Moreover, in these cases, the giver can determine the beneficiaries. Hence, it is not necessary for anyone to portray the beneficiaries as deserving of compassion. In essence, it seems that, outside of politics, compassion ought to have a large effect on preferences regardless of party.

In the analysis that follows, I examine the effects of compassion on a range of mass partisans' political and nonpolitical preferences. Consistent with the definition of

compassion, its effect ought to be strongest when people perceive program recipients are in need of help and support, which depends on the manner in which party elites have talked about the issue.

Dependent Variables

To understand compassion's role in political preferences, I identified a range of dependent variables on the GSS that parallel the policy areas included in the content analysis. These include preferences about government assistance to the poor, health care, immigration policy, abortion policy, and attitudes toward capital punishment. I also analyzed two items regarding assistance to the poor outside the realm of government: donation to charities and volunteering. This allows me to compare the prediction that compassion should work similarly for mass partisans when the issue has not been framed differently through political appeals.

To assess compassion's influence on *non-governmental* giving preferences, I measure both charitable giving and volunteer habits. Respondents answered how often they gave to charity in the past year, with answers ranging from "Not at all in the past year," to "More than once a week," along a 6 point ordinal scale. Respondents also answered how often they volunteered in the past year, with answers ranging from "Not at all in the past year," to "More than once a week," along a 6 point ordinal scale.

I use three different items to measure support for government assistance to the poor, specifically. The first asked respondents, "Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans. Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that

each person should take care of himself.” Respondents placed themselves along a 5 point scale, with higher scores indicating a preferences for more spending on the poor. The second item asked, “We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I’m going to name some of these problems, and for each one I’d like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on assistance to the poor?” The third question was worded the same way as the second question but asked about spending on “welfare.” For all three dependent variables, a positive coefficient in the model indicates greater support for government assistance and spending on the poor.

I also analyze capital punishment preferences. The GSS asked respondents, “Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?” and provided a 3 point scale with the response options, “Favor,” “Oppose,” and, “Not sure.” I code this variable to range from support for capital punishment to opposition. Positive coefficients indicate less support of the death penalty.

Health care preferences ought to be a function of compassion as well. The GSS included an item asking, “In general, some people think that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills. Others think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of these things themselves. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you made up your mind on this?” Respondents answered this question along a 5 point ordinal scale, with higher scores indicating greater support for government assistance in providing health care.

To measure immigration preferences, I use an item that asked respondents how much they agreed with the following statement, “America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.” They were given 5 response options, ranging from “Agree strongly” to “Disagree strongly.” I code the variable to range from strong support for excluding illegal immigrants to strong opposition to excluding them, so positive coefficients signify greater opposition to excluding illegal immigrants. Put another way, a positive effect suggests more sympathy for immigrants.

Finally, the GSS asked respondents about their abortion policy preferences. The item asked, “Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if the woman wants it for any reason.” Response options included, “Yes,” “No,” and, “Don’t know.” I code preferences about abortion to range from support for the least restrictive abortion rights to the most restrictive abortion rights. Hence, positive coefficients indicate support for greater restriction of abortion rights.

Independent Variables

These policy preferences ought to be a function of a host of different factors, but my analysis is most concerned with the effects of compassion. In Chapter 1, I introduced the items I use from the GSS to measure compassion. Respondents answered how much they agreed with the following questions: 1) “*People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate,*” and 2) “*These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others.*” The items have five response options, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. To create a compassion

scale, I code both items onto a (0-1) interval, combine them additively, and take the mean. Importantly, recall that I uncovered that partisans are the *same* on average in their propensity to experience compassion, contrary to what people's stereotypes about the parties might cause them to expect.

Of course, preferences on these matters depend on factors other than compassion. To increase confidence in any relationships I find between compassion and the dependent variables, I include these other factors in my models. First, I include the respondent's income level and highest education level completed. Both variables range from 0 at the lowest levels of education and income to 1 at the highest levels of education and income. I also include variables to measure race and gender, specifically, dummy variables for African Americans and for females. In the model, African American equals 1 and all other races equal 0; female equals 1 and male equals 0. To model immigration policy preferences, I also include a dummy variable for identifying as Hispanic, where 1 equals Hispanic and 0 equals non-Hispanic. In all the models, I include the respondent's self-placement on the ideological scale, which ranges from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Ideology is surely a central predictor of these political preferences. I code ideology from 0 to 1, where the most liberal is 0 and the most conservative is 1.

I also include a measure of racial attitudes in the models for policy preferences that might have been "racialized," such as opinions about welfare and the death penalty. Evidence suggests that attitudes toward African Americans influence preferences in these domains (Gilens 1999; Hurwitz and Peffley 2007). Although the GSS does not ask the full battery of racial resentment items used by the American National Election

Study, it does include one of them. Specifically, the items asks, “Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with the following statement: Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors.” High racial resentment is measured as greater agreement with the item, coded as 1, with the lowest racial resentment coded as 0.

I provide the results from these models below. The dependent variables I have chosen traverse several different policy domains, so I group the results by domain. Since my expectations for the effect of compassion differ based on party identification, I split the samples by party. I include leaners among partisans to maximize the number of cases available for analysis and because leaners and weak partisans tend to be largely indistinguishable on many political matters (Keith et al. 1986).

I pool together all iterations of the GSS that ask the compassion items, which incorporates the years 2002, 2004, 2012, and 2014. Pooling the years allows for a more straightforward presentation of results. However, my analysis of immigration attitudes is limited to the year 2014 because that was the only year that both the immigration policy item and the compassion items were asked to the same subset of respondents.

The other models include all years with a few exceptions.²⁰

Results

Non-governmental assistance to the poor

²⁰Health care and the first dependent variable about assistance to the poor do not include the year 2012. The second dependent variable about spending on the poor does not include the year 2014. In those instances, compassion, racial resentment, and the dependent variable were not asked to the same sample of respondents.

Turning to the results, I first analyze dependent variables related to helping others in need in the private sphere. If the measure of compassion is a good one, it ought to affect people's preference for helping others in need. Moreover, my theory posits that compassion should affect people's non-government preferences similarly, regardless of what party they identify with. Politics matters less in the non-political sphere and respondents decide on their own whether beneficiaries are worthy. Political elites are not necessary to guide them. Table 10 contains the results of the effect of compassion on frequency of donating to charity and volunteering.

TABLE 10 Effect of Compassion on Non-Governmental Assistance to the Poor

	Donating to Charity			Volunteering		
	All	Democrats	Republicans	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.291* (0.027)	0.243* (0.042)	0.318* (0.045)	0.201* (0.031)	0.160* (0.048)	0.223* (0.052)
Ideology	0.095* (0.023)	0.044 (0.035)	0.103* (0.039)	0.034 (0.026)	-0.004 (0.040)	0.062 (0.046)
Education	0.161* (0.035)	0.055 (0.052)	0.308* (0.064)	0.279* (0.040)	0.204* (0.059)	0.493* (0.075)
Female	0.013 (0.009)	0.035* (0.014)	-0.002 (0.016)	0.025* (0.011)	0.023 (0.016)	0.018 (0.018)
Black	-0.007 (0.015)	-0.015 (0.017)	0.071 (0.046)	0.025 (0.016)	0.017 (0.020)	0.087 (0.054)
Racial Resentment	0.016 (0.017)	-0.007 (0.023)	0.067* (0.032)	-0.029 (0.019)	-0.063* (0.026)	0.024 (0.038)
Income	0.266* (0.022)	0.293* (0.033)	0.281* (0.039)	0.056* (0.024)	0.080* (0.037)	0.062 (0.045)
Republican	0.070* (0.014)	----	----	0.058* (0.016)	----	----
Democrat	0.020 (0.013)	----	----	0.024 (0.015)	----	----
Constant	-0.237* (0.035)	-0.103* (0.053)	-0.342* (0.062)	-0.184* (0.039)	-0.056 (0.060)	-0.357* (0.073)
<i>n</i>	2886	1307	1012	2885	1307	1012
<i>R</i> ²	0.165	0.115	0.168	0.066	0.049	0.085

Source: 2002, 2004, 2012, 2014 General Social Survey
 OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1 **p*<.1

As expected, when it comes to helping others when government is not involved, compassion has a large effect on both Republican and Democratic respondents. The most compassionate Democrats are about 24 percentage points more likely to donate to

charity than the least compassionate Democrats. Compassion appears to have an even larger effect on Republican identifiers. The most compassionate Republicans are about 32 percentage points more likely, compared to their least compassionate fellow partisans, to engage in charitable donations. Compassion has similar, albeit smaller, effects on volunteering. Its effect is significant but smaller for Democrats, a 16 percentage point change. Compassion's effect is larger for Republicans, with 22 percentage points dividing low and high compassion respondents in their likelihood of volunteering.

The effect of compassion is also large compared to the other independent variables included in the model. The only other variables that have similarly large effects are education and income. Not surprisingly, wealthier respondents are much more likely to favor donating to charity than those who make less. The wealthiest respondents are about 27 percentage points more likely to donate frequently to charity than are the least wealthy respondents. In contrast, one's level of income does not affect likelihood of volunteering. Instead, education has the largest effects on volunteering. More highly educated Democrats are 20 percentage points more likely to volunteer than the least educated Democrats. Education's effect is even larger for Republicans—highly educated Republicans are almost 50 percentage points more likely to volunteer as are the least educated Republicans, an effect size that points up the importance of studying compassion.

In short, the results in Table 10 are important because they illustrate that the measure of compassion I employ works as it should. Greater compassion is associated with a higher likelihood of helping others in need, either through donating time or

money. In addition, they reveal that, for issues for which compassion is not politicized, it seems to work in a similar way for mass partisans. In fact, compassion has a particularly large effect for Republicans in this realm. This result makes sense given that over the past several decades Republican presidential candidates were more likely than Democratic candidates to connect compassion to private solutions, calling for, “compassionate conservatism” and non-government solutions to the nation’s problems. It appears that it is here that Republican partisans direct their compassion.

Government Assistance to the Poor

The results above stand in stark contrast to the effects of compassion on *government* assistance to those in need. Table 11 reports the effects of compassion on three separate items capturing preferences about government assistance to the poor. Recall that they are measures of support for: government assistance to the poor, spending to help the poor, and spending on welfare. Recall, too, that positive coefficients indicate greater support for assistance to the poor.

TABLE 11 Effect of Compassion on Support for Government Assistance to the Poor

	Government Should Improve Standard of Living			Spending on Government Assistance to the Poor			Welfare Spending		
	All	Democrats	Republicans	All	Democrats	Republicans	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.137* (0.048)	0.214* (0.070)	0.017 (0.082)	0.113* (0.051)	0.200* (0.063)	-0.007 (0.095)	0.199* (0.049)	0.208* (0.075)	0.034 (0.075)
Ideology	-0.140* (0.040)	-0.134* (0.059)	-0.225* (0.068)	-0.165* (0.043)	-0.073 (0.050)	-0.364* (0.090)	-0.195* (0.041)	-0.236* (0.065)	-0.169* (0.063)
Education	-0.060 (0.063)	0.050 (0.087)	-0.229* (0.113)	-0.192* (0.068)	-0.113 (0.079)	-0.360* (0.153)	-0.148* (0.061)	-0.149 (0.093)	-0.272* (0.098)
Female	0.001 (0.017)	-0.032 (0.026)	0.015 (0.027)	-0.002 (0.018)	-0.010 (0.021)	-0.004 (0.037)	-0.029* (0.017)	-0.051* (0.026)	-0.024 (0.025)
Black	0.090* (0.026)	0.095* (0.031)	0.016 (0.077)	0.101* (0.027)	0.097* (0.025)	0.063 (0.102)	0.077* (0.026)	0.072* (0.031)	0.101 (0.077)
Racial Resentment	-0.103* (0.030)	-0.126* (0.041)	-0.115* (0.055)	-0.049 (0.032)	-0.048 (0.034)	0.003 (0.074)	-0.213* (0.029)	-0.241* (0.041)	-0.217* (0.051)
Income	-0.121* (0.037)	-0.120* (0.053)	-0.130* (0.067)	-0.061 (0.042)	-0.054 (0.046)	-0.028 (0.092)	-0.207* (0.038)	-0.184* (0.061)	-0.159* (0.060)
Republican	-0.108* (0.024)	----	----	-0.094* (0.027)	----	----	-0.121* (0.024)	----	----
Democrat	0.012 (0.023)	----	----	0.049* (0.025)	----	----	0.026 (0.023)	----	----
Constant	0.719* (0.060)	0.633* (0.087)	0.880* (0.106)	1.013* (0.067)	0.906* (0.079)	1.183* (0.140)	0.763* (0.061)	0.818* (0.095)	0.791* (0.100)
<i>n</i>	1136	515	403	1083	483	387	1803	825	626
<i>R</i> ²	0.144	0.087	0.080	0.144	0.070	0.070	0.171	0.104	0.096

The first thing to note is that the pattern of effects for compassion on party identifiers is very similar across all three items. It has a significant, substantial, and consistent effect for Democrats, with a coefficient around 0.2 for each item. For Republicans, however, compassion has no effect on support for government improving the standard of living for poor people, government spending increasing to help the poor, and increasing spending on welfare. Hence, more compassionate Democrats are roughly 20 percentage points more in favor of government assistance to the poor and of increased spending towards those goals than the least compassionate Democrats are. Among Republicans, the least and most compassionate respondents do not differ much on average in their policy preferences regarding government aid to the poor.

Education, income, ideology, and racial resentment affect preferences for all three items. Ideology plays a much larger role in explaining preferences for Republicans than Democrats for the first two items. The most conservative Republicans are 23 and 36 percentage points more opposed, respectively, to government improving the poor's standard of living and to spending on assistance to the poor than the least conservative Republicans. For Democrats, their preferences about these two policies are not strongly affected by their ideology. Instead, it is compassion that plays a large role in structuring their opinions on these items. However, ideology is influential for both Democrats and Republicans' welfare preferences. The most liberal Democrats are 24 percentage points more in favor of welfare spending than the most conservative Democrats. And, the most conservative Republicans are 17 percentage points more opposed to welfare spending than the most liberal Republicans.

Education has a negative influence on supporting government assistance to the

poor, but it has a much bigger influence on Republicans' preferences than it does on Democrats'. The most educated Republicans are significantly more opposed to increasing government spending on welfare (27 percentage points) and to assistance to the poor (36 percentage points). This might seem at odds with the fact that more educated individuals generally score higher on the compassion items. Education's effect on Republicans' preferences in this realm suggests that better educated Republicans are particularly adept at mimicking the party line on this issue.

Racial resentment also helps explain policy preferences about government assistance to the poor. Its effect is largest for the racialized term "welfare." When asking respondents about assistance to the poor, racial resentment plays a smaller, though still significant role. Highly racially resentful Democrats and Republicans are 24 and 22 percentage points more opposed, on average, to welfare spending than the least racially resentful respondents. This stands in stark contrast to racial resentment's null effects on charitable giving and volunteering. These differences are likely the result of the fact that Americans often link government assistance to the poor as benefiting African Americans, and, thus, negative racial attitudes are more likely to influence their support of such assistance (Gilens 1999).

In sum, the overall pattern of results provided in Table 11 is consistent with my content work that finds that Democratic elites use compassionate language much more than Republican elites do when discussing government food assistance to the poor. As a result, highly compassionate Democrats are more likely to support government aid to the poor than less compassionate Democrats. Republican leaders frame government assistance to the poor differently. First, they frame their opposition as motivated by

principled conservatism, arguing in favor of cutting programs to limit the size of government and to expand individual freedom, with private organizations a better way to help others in need than government. Such frames would not bring to mind compassionate considerations. The second rhetorical theme members of Congress used was to portray recipients of food assistance as undeserving of compassion. This frame ought to sever any link between compassion and views about government assistance. If the poor are deemed unworthy of compassion, even highly compassionate individuals will not connect their compassion to preferences about policies that assist the poor.²¹ That is what my results suggest.

Capital punishment

Next, I turn to an analysis of compassion’s effects on attitudes about capital punishment. Table 12 reports the effects of compassion on support for capital punishment, with separate models for Democratic and Republican identifiers. Recall that this variable is coded to range from support for capital punishment to opposition, so positive coefficients indicate greater anti-death penalty attitudes.

TABLE 12 Effect of Compassion on Opposition to the Death Penalty

	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.243* (0.047)	0.311* (0.078)	0.145* (0.069)
Ideology	-0.114* (0.040)	-0.091 (0.065)	-0.082 (0.061)

²¹ The survey findings do not elucidate if Republican identifiers actually view recipients as unworthy of compassion or if they simply consider the issue in light of other factors, such as the size of government. The fact that Republicans’ preferences are influenced by compassion in donating and volunteering might, at first glance, appear to be in line with principled conservatism. Government is viewed as an ineffective way to help. Yet, it might also be that Republicans do not view those in need of government help as deserving, and only when they are able to choose the recipients of help will they favor providing assistance. Taxes do not allow people to determine the beneficiaries.

Education	-0.015 (0.061)	0.110 (0.096)	-0.027 (0.099)
Female	0.042* (0.016)	0.020 (0.027)	0.053* (0.024)
Black	0.112* (0.025)	0.116* (0.032)	0.078 (0.073)
Racial Resentment	-0.278* (0.029)	-0.277* (0.042)	-0.217* (0.050)
Income	-0.050 (0.038)	-0.039 (0.061)	-0.138* (0.060)
Republican	-0.119* (0.024)	----	----
Democrat	0.018 (0.023)	----	----
Constant	0.467* (0.060)	0.345* (0.098)	0.415* (0.096)
<i>n</i>	2869	1301	1007
<i>R</i> ²	0.117	0.080	0.044

Source: 2002, 2004, 2012, 2014 General Social Survey
OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1 * $p < .1$

The results in Table 12 demonstrate that compassion has a significant effect on views about capital punishment for both Republicans and Democrats. Although the significant effect for Republicans was not expected, the effect of compassion is twice as large for Democrats as it is for Republicans, other things being equal. Indeed compassion's effect on Democrats is larger than any other variable in the model. The most compassionate Republicans are 15 percentage points more opposed to capital punishment than the least compassionate Republicans; for Democrats that difference is 31 percentage points.

This result is surprising for Republicans, given that Republican elites did not talk about compassion for people sentenced to the death penalty, only referencing

compassion for the victims and victims' families of the crimes committed. Instead of more compassionate Republicans being moved in *support* of the death penalty, they are actually slightly more opposed. I can only speculate as to why compassion plays a role in Republican identifiers' opposition to the death penalty. It is possible that Republican elites' appeals to compassion for the victims of crimes were ineffectual. It appears from these results that Republican identifiers consider the person being executed—the direct target of the policy—more than the victims of the crimes committed, when determining their attitudes on capital punishment. For Democrats, this issue appears to revolve largely around considerations of compassion. Highly compassionate Democrats are much more opposed to the death penalty than the least compassionate Democrats, and this effect is greater than any other variable in the model.

Notably, racial resentment has large effects among both Democrats and Republicans. The analysis indicates that respondents consider the racial makeup of those who are executed in forming their opinions about this issue. Respondents with more racially resentful views are much more supportive of the death penalty—over 22 percentage points more—compared with those who score low on the measure of racial resentment. Beyond compassion and racial resentment, the only other variables that reach statistical significance for either party are income and race. African-American Democrats are 12 percentage points more opposed to the death penalty than Democrats of other races. Wealthy Republicans are about 14 percentage points more supportive of capital punishment than poor Republicans.

In sum, it appears that Democrats connect compassion to the issue of capital punishment, in accordance with the way the issue is framed by Democratic leaders.

Contrary to Republican elite messages, Republican identifiers also seem to consider the issue of capital punishment in terms of compassion for death row inmates. Although the result for Republicans is unexpected, compassion's effect on Democrats' preferences is twice as large as on Republicans' preferences.

Health care

Table 13 provides the results of my analysis of support for government assistance in health care, again divided by party. Recall that positive coefficients signify greater support for government assistance in the health care domain.

TABLE 13 Effect of Compassion on Support for Government Assistance in Health Care

	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.172* (0.050)	0.263* (0.067)	0.058 (0.093)
Ideology	-0.242* (0.042)	-0.159* (0.056)	-0.244* (0.077)
Education	-0.041 (0.066)	0.072 (0.082)	-0.278* (0.129)
Female	-0.002 (0.018)	0.008 (0.024)	-0.009 (0.031)
Black	0.017 (0.027)	0.029 (0.029)	-0.008 (0.087)
Racial Resentment	-0.067* (0.031)	-0.071* (0.039)	-0.181* (0.063)
Income	-0.099* (0.039)	-0.072 (0.050)	-0.147* (0.076)
Republican	-0.055* (0.026)	----	----
Democrat	0.065* (0.024)	----	----

Constant	0.777*	0.642*	1.103*
	(0.064)	(0.082)	(0.121)
<i>N</i>	1136	515	403
<i>R</i> ²	0.132	0.077	0.087

Source: 2002, 2004, 2012, 2014 General Social Survey
 OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1 * $p < .1$

As expected, preferences on health care seem to be a function of compassion, but only for Democrats. The most compassionate Democrats are about 26 percentage points more in favor of the federal government providing assistance to health care than are the least compassionate Democrats. The magnitude of this effect compares favorably with all other variables in the model. For Republicans, on the other hand, the effect of compassion is not significant in explaining their preferences about government involvement in health care.

The effect of ideology is also noteworthy. The most liberal Democrats are, on average, about 16 percentage points more in favor of government assistance in health care than the most conservative Democrats. For Republicans, the effect of ideology is even larger, with the most conservative Republicans 24 percentage points more opposed to government involvement in the health care realm than the most liberal Republicans. Although these effects for ideology are substantively large, the estimated effect of compassion among Democrats is even larger, which is again indicative of the unappreciated importance of compassion in understanding Americans' political preferences.

Racial resentment and education also have significant effects, but only among Republicans. The most racially resentful Republicans are, on average, about 18 percentage points more opposed to federal government involvement in health care. This result implies that Republicans' preferences about health care involve considerations

about the race of the recipient, similar to their preferences about welfare (Gilens 1999). For Democrats, however, racial resentment does not influence their health care policy preferences. In that sense, their preferences do not seem to be racialized in this domain. Lastly, education also has a large effect, but only for Republicans. Highly educated Republicans are 28 percentage points more opposed to government assistance in the realm of health care. This is the only estimated effect on health care that is larger than the effect that compassion had among Democrats.

These findings are broadly consistent with my content work. Republican leaders have not framed the debate over health care in terms of compassion. Instead, they have framed health care spending as encroaching upon individual freedoms and expanding the size of government, frames unrelated to compassion. It makes sense, then, that, unlike Democrats, Republican identifiers do not organize their political preferences about health care around their propensities toward compassion.

That being said, my content work suggested Democratic Party leaders' framing was uneven. President Obama emphasized the policy specifics of the Affordable Care Act and its historical implications, using little compassionate language, while members of Congress framed the ACA debate in compassionate terms. I find here that healthcare follows the same pattern as other social welfare preferences, in that compassion has a significant effect on Democrats' views. These results indicate that Democratic identifiers perceive health care as an issue related to compassion, leading highly compassionate Democrats to support health care assistance by the government and less compassionate Democrats to be less supportive of such assistance.

Immigration Policy

Next, I turn to compassion's influence on attitudes about immigration policy.

Table 14 presents estimates from a model explaining Americans' opposition to exclusionary immigration policy. Again, I estimate separate models for Democratic and Republican identifiers, including Independents who lean toward one of the two parties. Recall that positive coefficients signify greater opposition to excluding illegal immigrants.

TABLE 14 Effect of Compassion on Opposition to Excluding Illegal Immigrants

	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.032 (0.054)	0.158* (0.085)	-0.086 (0.084)
Ideology	-0.186* (0.046)	-0.159* (0.077)	-0.191* (0.075)
Education	-0.140* (0.065)	-0.063 (0.100)	-0.098 (0.107)
Female	0.013 (0.018)	-0.025 (0.030)	0.013 (0.027)
Black	-0.000 (0.029)	-0.023 (0.036)	0.070 (0.073)
Hispanic	0.257* (0.025)	0.258* (0.036)	0.167* (0.054)
Racial Resentment	-0.153* (0.032)	-0.155* (0.044)	-0.302* (0.061)
Income	-0.038 (0.044)	-0.094 (0.072)	-0.112 (0.074)
Republican	-0.072* (0.027)	----	----
Democrat	0.023 (0.024)	----	----

Constant	0.626*	0.562*	0.790*
	(0.068)	(0.111)	(0.112)
<i>n</i>	746	343	241
<i>R</i> ²	0.275	0.189	0.218

Source: 2014 General Social Survey²²
 OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1 **p*<.1

Again the results follow the expected pattern. Similar to social welfare policies related to the poor and health care, compassion has a significant effect on preferences about immigration, but only among Democrats. The estimated effect in this domain is a bit smaller than in the others, but it is still statistically significant and substantively large. The most compassionate Democrats are 16 percentage points more opposed to exclusionary immigration policy than the least compassionate Democrats are. The least and most compassionate Republicans, on the other hand, have similar immigration preferences on average. As with the other social welfare domains, the results make sense given that Democrats framed immigration as an issue about compassion for undocumented immigrants, while Republican leaders did not.

Other variables in the model also have a significant effect on immigration preferences for both Republicans and Democrats. These include ideology, racial resentment, and being Hispanic. More conservative Democrats and Republicans are 16 and 19 percentage points, respectively, more in favor of America taking stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants. Being Hispanic has the opposite effect: Hispanic Democrats are 26 percentage points more opposed to such measures compared to non-Hispanic Democrats, and Hispanic Republicans are 17 percentage points more

²²2014 was the only year that the GSS asked both the compassion items and the immigration item to the same respondents.

opposed than non-Hispanic Republicans.

Interesting party differences emerge in regards to racial resentment. Although the racial resentment item asks specifically about African Americans, it has a huge effect on immigration attitudes among Republicans. The most racially resentful Republicans are 30 percentage points more in favor of exclusionary immigration policy; for Democrats, its effect is 15 percentage points. As Kinder and Sanders (1996) also note, racial resentment clearly captures something beyond just attitudes toward African Americans.

In sum, one's propensity toward compassion is an important predictor of views about immigration, but only among Democrats. This makes sense because Democratic leaders have regularly framed immigration as a compassion issue. The surprise here is the relatively modest effect of compassion on Democratic identifiers. Republican identifiers, on the other hand, rely on other considerations in forming their preferences about immigration, most notably their racial attitudes. My content analysis illustrates that Republican leaders tend to frame the immigration debate around law and order considerations, not on compassion for undocumented immigrants. This might be why the effect of racial resentment is so large; law and order is a racialized domain.

In Chapter 5, I specifically test an appeal designed to make compassionate considerations relevant to both Democrats and Republicans in their immigration policy preferences. I find that compassionate appeals can influence Republicans as well as Democrats in this realm, particularly when a recipient is portrayed as not having caused his or her plight.

Abortion policy

Abortion is the last of the policy issues I examine for which I expect compassion to have an effect on people's preferences. Only, here, it was Republican elites who used compassionate language more than Democratic elites, indicating it should guide Republican partisans to use compassion in forming their policy preferences more than Democratic partisans. Recall that positive coefficients indicate support for greater restriction of abortion rights.

TABLE 15 Effect of Compassion on Limiting Abortion

	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.077* (0.046)	-0.108 (0.072)	0.307* (0.073)
Ideology	0.423* (0.038)	0.410* (0.056)	0.482* (0.066)
Education	-0.515* (0.057)	-0.558* (0.086)	-0.312* (0.104)
Female	-0.008 (0.016)	-0.048* (0.023)	0.025 (0.027)
Black	0.029 (0.024)	0.046 (0.028)	0.011 (0.083)
Income	-0.201* (0.037)	-0.198* (0.055)	-0.218* (0.065)
Republican	0.126* (0.023)	----	----
Democrat	-0.017 (0.022)	----	----
Constant	0.749* (0.052)	0.911 (0.079)	0.534* (0.093)
<i>n</i>	3514	1636	1185
<i>R</i> ²	0.122	0.120	0.077

Source: 2002, 2004, 2012, 2014 General Social Survey
OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1 **p*<.1

The results in Table 15 confirm my expectation. As predicted from the differences I noted in rhetoric about abortion, the effect of compassion on abortion policy preferences differs by partisanship. Compassion informs preferences in this policy area among Republican Party identifiers but not among Democrats, although the effect among Democrats approaches statistical significance and carries the opposite sign as Republicans. For Republicans, compassion has a substantively large effect on support for abortion rights; moving from least to most compassionate causes, on average, an increase of 30 percentage points in restricting abortion, other things being equal. This effect seems particularly large, given that the effect of compassion among Democrats in other policy domains tended to be in the 20 to 25 point range. Perhaps this is because the unborn are perceived as uniquely worthy of compassion. Ideology and education have similarly large effects.

Compassion does not, however, guide Democrats' preferences about abortion. This is significant in that it is the one area where compassion does not have a large influence on Democrats' preferences, and it is also where it influences Republicans the most. Yet the result makes sense in light of the fact that Democratic leaders framed the abortion debate about women's rights, not about compassion for women who have abortions. While compassion's effect is insignificant for Democrats, it is actually in the opposite direction, indicating that any effect compassion might have on Democratic identifiers would be to make them actually more likely to understand the program through the perspective of the pregnant woman.²³

²³ Data from my recent experiment in May 2016 indicates compassion now affects Democrats' preferences about abortion policy, where more compassionate Democrats are more in favor of abortion rights, potentially reflecting a change in how Democrats frame the abortion debate.

Ideology and education also have large effects among Democrats in explaining abortion policy preferences. More conservative Democrats and Republicans are over 40 percentage points more likely to be pro-life, respectively, compared to the most liberal identifiers of both parties. Education has the opposite effect. The most highly educated Republicans are 31 percentage points more in favor of abortion rights, while the most highly educated Democrats are an enormous 56 percentage points more in favor, as compared to the least educated respondents. In the same direction as education, income affects greater likelihood of being pro-choice, with wealthier respondents roughly 20 percentage points more in favor of abortion rights than those with the lowest incomes.

Education spending

Finally, I included an item in my analysis from the political realm that should not be influenced by compassion: education spending. Education is a broad-based issue that affects groups equally, not just those in need. Public schools serve citizens from all socioeconomic backgrounds. To measure preferences about education spending, the GSS asked, “We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount... Improving the nation's education system.” Respondents were given three response options: “Too much,” “Too little,” or, “About right.” I code this variable so that support for more spending on education is signified by a positive coefficient. The education spending question appeared in the years 2002, 2004, and 2014. Table 16 provides the results the analysis.

TABLE 16 Effect of Compassion on Education Spending

	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	-0.025 (0.037)	0.003 (0.042)	-0.086 (0.070)
Ideology	-0.165* (0.031)	-0.059* (0.033)	-0.347* (0.067)
Education	0.007 (0.047)	0.054 (0.052)	0.084 (0.108)
Female	0.021 (0.013)	0.003 (0.014)	0.057* (0.026)
Black	0.077* (0.020)	0.071* (0.017)	-0.027 (0.078)
Income	0.051* (0.030)	0.129* (0.032)	0.000 (0.067)
Democrat	0.067* (0.018)	----	----
Republican	-0.001 (0.019)	----	----
Constant	0.873* (0.042)	0.798* (0.047)	1.003* (0.087)
<i>n</i>	1793	807	627
<i>R</i> ²	0.062	0.046	0.049

Source: 2002, 2004, 2012, 2014 General Social Survey
 OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1 **p*<.1

The results indicate that education is not connected to considerations about compassion in public opinion, unlike issues specifically targeting groups in need. The most and least compassionate respondents of both parties are equally supportive of education spending on average. Party identification also has a small but significant effect here. Democrats are about 7 percentage points more in favor of increased spending on education than Independents. Ideology has the largest effect in the model, and its effect

is huge for Republicans. The most conservative Republicans are 35 percentage points less supportive of education spending than the most liberal Republicans. Income also has an effect but only among Democrats. The wealthiest Democrats are 13 percentage points more supportive of education spending. In sum, for a broad-based policy such as education, compassion does not appear to have an effect on political preferences.

Conclusion

Using four iterations of the General Social Survey, I uncover that a propensity toward compassion affects political preferences on a range of issues. Yet I find that the effect of compassion differs widely by partisanship. Compassion affects Democrats' policy preferences on a wide range of policy areas, namely, health care, welfare, immigration, and capital punishment. Republican identifiers largely do not arrive at their political preferences in these domains based on their levels of compassion, with the exception of a smaller effect of compassion on their preferences about capital punishment. Compassion does, however, exert a large influence on Republicans' preferences about abortion, with more compassionate Republicans much more pro-life. Notably, this is also the one realm where compassion appears not to influence Democrats' preferences. My analysis also finds that Republicans' nonpolitical behaviors, such as volunteering and donating to charity, are just as strongly affected by their levels of compassion, and actually even more so, than are those of Democrats.

In addition to the differing effects of compassion among partisans, the analysis also suggests that compassion influences Democrats' preferences for recipients such as undocumented immigrants, death row inmates, and welfare recipients. These are all

groups that some people would regard as having contributed to their plight, in particular, death row inmates. For Republican identifiers, compassion seems to primarily influence their preferences for helping low controllability recipients of compassion. This comprises the unborn, a group that all people perceive as having no control over its circumstance.

In the following chapters, I build upon my theory of elite activation of compassion and my analysis of survey data and elite messages. Using a sequence of experiments, I test whether compassionate appeals can activate the use of compassion in forming political preferences. I examine a less clearly partisan issue that affects people in need as a first test for whether framing can activate compassion similarly for mass partisans.

Appendix B Survey Items

Independent Variables:

Compassion 1

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others

Compassion 2

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate

Racial resentment

Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with the following statement: Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors.

Dependent Variables:

Given to charity

During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things:

Given money to a charity

[Once a week, Once a month, At least 2 or 3 times in the past year, Once in the past year, Not at all in the past year]

Volunteer

During the past 12 months, how often have you done each of the following things:

Done volunteer work for a charity

[Once a week, Once a month, At least 2 or 3 times in the past year, Once in the past year, Not at all in the past year]

Government improve standard of living

Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans; they are at Point 1 on this card.

Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself; they are at Point 5.

Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you have up your mind on this?

Assistance to the poor, spending

We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or

inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on...?

Assistance to the poor

[Too much, too little, about the right amount]

Welfare spending

We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on...?

Welfare

[Too much, too little, about the right amount]

Death penalty

Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

[Favor, Oppose, Don't know]

Immigration

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.

Abortion

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if:

The woman wants it for any reason?

[Favor, Oppose, Don't know]

Government assistance to the sick

In general, some people think that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills.

Others think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of these things themselves.

Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?

[5 response options]

Education

We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on...?

Improving the nation's education system

[Too much, too little, about the right amount]

CHAPTER IV

AN EXPERIMENT ON COMPASSION AND DISABILITY POLICY

So far, my research has employed a combination of public opinion survey evidence and content analyses of political speeches. Using these methods, I find evidence that suggests elites use compassion differently in their messages and that, as a consequence, mass partisans connect compassion to their political preferences in accordance with these different party frames. I have not directly tested, however, whether rhetoric activates compassion as a force in public opinion. I now turn to such a test to investigate the question: Do political messages that use compassionate language cause people to use compassion to inform their policy preferences? I use a sequence of experiments to test whether or not framing an issue to evoke compassion activates the use of compassion in preference formation about disability, specifically.

Framing studies demonstrate that attitudes are influenced by the importance individuals place on relevant considerations in response to political stimuli (Nelson et al. 1997). In this chapter, I provide the results of an experiment that uses a news story to frame an issue in compassionate terms and compares it to one in which the issue is not framed in such terms. The experiment examines the degree to which messages of compassion prompt people to rely on compassionate considerations in their support for government assistance for people with disabilities, a policy that affects people in need. Further, the experiment varies the presence or absence of partisan cues in order to understand the effect of the source of the message on the effectiveness of these appeals. My expectation is that compassionate frames from a co-partisan will activate

compassion. If the compassionate frame is connected to a person from the opposite party, I expect it will not have such an effect. If this turns out to be correct, it would provide me more confidence that the results I presented last chapter were driven by elite rhetoric, as I hypothesized.

Compassionate Appeals and Disability Policy Preferences

I use disability policy preferences as a test of my hypothesis for a number of reasons. Mass partisans likely hold more entrenched views about issues upon which the parties have staked out clear partisan stances than about those for which they have not done so. Moving preferences on an issue like healthcare with a one-time experiment would be very difficult given how well rehearsed preferences on this issue are for many people. To overcome this limitation, I first designed an experiment that focuses on an issue with relatively low partisan salience. Although disability policy falls underneath the Democratic Party umbrella of expanded provision of social welfare, it is not a particularly salient issue, especially compared to politically divisive social programs, such as welfare policy. As evidence, a recent survey found that the Americans with Disabilities Act receives widespread support across partisan and socioeconomic groups (Harris Poll 2015).

Disability policy is also a useful first test of the effect of compassionate appeals in politics because disabled people are a group that most people deem worthy of compassion (van Oorschot 2000; Will 1993). Hence, not only has disability policy not been politically contested of late, it is also one that affects people whose plights are perceived as largely externally controllable. People generally do not blame individuals

who have disabilities for being the cause of those disabilities. In this way, the disabled are what I have referred to as a “simple” group to appeal to compassion for.

Appeals to compassion for the disabled, then, should be effective for both Republicans and Democrats. My content work suggests that Republican elites make few appeals for more “complex” beneficiaries—that is, those who might be seen as contributing to their plight, which might make appeals to such groups less effective for Republican identifiers. As a result, compassionate appeals about disability policy ought to affect both Democrats and Republicans, both because the policy involves a group in need that is perceived as not in control of its circumstances and because it does not engender strong partisan divisions.

Experimental Design

In the experiment that follows, I frame an appeal to government support for disability policy in two different ways. In one condition, a mock news story emphasizes compassion. In the other, a similar mock news story portrays the same situation but refrains from using compassionate language. My theory postulates that compassionate language will activate people’s propensity toward compassion in the first of the two conditions. Evidence of this would be an increase in compassion’s effect on attitudes about disability policy in the compassion condition compared with the non-compassion condition. I also expect that partisans will be more likely to accept appeals—and thus use their compassion in forming their opinions—if they come from their own party leaders (e.g. Dalton et al. 1998; Zaller 1992; Slothuus and Vreese 2010). Specifically, my theory holds that party elites’ use of compassionate language will encourage their

own party's identifiers in the electorate to consider those issues in terms of compassion and that this should not have the same effect on partisans of the other party. Hence, I also vary the presence or absence of party cues in the experiment. Taken together, I compare four conditions: two contain compassionate appeals with either a Democratic or Republican cue, one contains an appeal with no party cue, and one is a non-compassion condition, containing no compassionate appeal.

Characteristics of the Sample

The experiment was conducted using a large online sample gathered by Survey Sampling International (SSI). Participants completed a 10 minute study that included two experiments. My experiment was embedded in the first half. The SSI sample had a roughly even split between identifiers of the two parties: 40 percent of the study participants were Democrats or leaned Democrat and 35 percent were Republicans or leaned Republican. There were slightly more women than men in the study, at 54 percent of the respondents. SSI participants were fairly representative of typical Americans in their income levels. The average income for the SSI participants was \$58,000. However, the sample included a higher percentage of whites: 75 percent of the SSI participants identified as white, 10 percent as black, 7 percent as Hispanic or Latino and 5 percent as Asian. Importantly, identifiers of both parties were relatively similar in their levels of compassion, akin to what the GSS surveys reveal. On average, participants' mean compassion levels were 0.734 on a 0 to 1 scale, with Democrats only an average of 0.04 points more compassionate than Republicans, neither a statistically nor substantively meaningful difference.

Dependent Variables

To measure preferences about disability policy, participants answered two different items following the experimental manipulation. These items constitute the dependent variables I use in the analysis. Specifically, participants answered how much they agreed with the following statements: “The government should allocate more funds to help disabled people,” and “I would be more likely to vote for a candidate who championed government help for disabled people.” The response categories ranged from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” on five-point scales. Because disability policy involves a group in need, the assumption is that compassion will lead, on average, to greater support for government assistance for the disabled.²⁴

Experimental Manipulation

The experimental manipulation consisted of study participants reading a mock news story. They were randomly assigned to read an article that included either a compassion-based frame or a non-compassion frame: the former included compassionate language while the latter did not. Specifically, the article described a shortfall of assistance for the disabled in the United States and advocated for additional government support. In the compassion frames, the article depicted disabled people as being in need and deserving of help. In contrast, the non-compassion frame emphasized the policy specifics surrounding the disability issue, rather than emotional language or characteristics of the people in need.

²⁴ If one perceives government as an ineffective way to help, compassion would not necessarily induce greater support for government support. In that case, higher compassion might instead lead to greater support for private sector solutions. In the study, I also include a measure of the propensity to donate to an organization that assists the disabled. I find that the correlation between donating and support for government policy to assist individuals with disabilities is large and positive, even among conservatives and Republicans. I find no evidence to suggest that highly compassionate conservatives are more likely to donate to a private charity in lieu of supporting government assistance.

I also examined whether partisans were more or less receptive to compassionate cues if they come from their own party’s leaders. Thus, the experimental conditions also varied the presence or absence of party cues. Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of four news stories. The non-compassion group read a story without compassionate appeals and without party cues; the non-partisan treatment group read a story with compassionate appeals but without party cues; the Democratic-cued treatment group read a story with compassionate appeals with a policy proposal endorsed by a Democrat; and the Republican-cued treatment group read a story with compassionate appeals with a policy proposal endorsed by a Republican. Each of the partisan conditions included two partisan cues within the news story. The treatments appear below in Table 17.

TABLE 17 Experimental Treatments

<p><i>Non-Compassion Treatment</i></p> <p>In the United States today, there exists a lack of qualified people employed in health services for the disabled. This problem has led advocates to propose new ways of dealing with this issue. A report last month by the American Center for Public Health described the current state of our country’s policy toward people who have disabilities. Advocates and experts who spoke with U.S. News describe a system in shambles, ineffective and without adequate resources to address the issue each year. The failure to provide treatment and services to people with disabilities – both in the community and in hospitals – has created a problem that needs to be addressed, says Mike Kennedy, a former congressman from Rhode Island who has worked on this issue for years. “I urge policy-makers to find a practical solution,” he said in a statement yesterday morning.</p>
<p><i>Compassion Treatment- No Party Cue</i></p> <p>In the United States today, disabled children and their families struggle to find qualified people to help with their care. The immense suffering experienced by these families, through no fault of their own, has led political leaders to propose new ways of helping people with disabilities. Advocates and experts who spoke with U.S. News describe a system in shambles, neglecting to bring relief to people across the country each year. The failure to provide treatment and supportive services to people with disabilities—both in the community and in hospitals—has left untreated patients and their families without necessary help, says Mike Kennedy, a former congressman from Rhode Island who has fought to provide better care for the disabled. “We need to help these struggling families,” he said. “This is a public policy problem about basic human needs not being met.”</p>
<p><i>Compassion Treatment- Republican Cue</i></p>

In the United States today, disabled children and their families struggle to find qualified people to help with their care. The immense suffering experienced by these families, through no fault of their own, has led Republican Party leaders to propose new ways of helping people with disabilities. Advocates and experts who spoke with U.S. News describe a system in shambles, neglecting to bring relief to people across the country each year. The failure to provide treatment and supportive services to people with disabilities—both in the community and in hospitals—has left untreated patients and their families without necessary help, says Mike Kennedy, a former Republican congressman from Rhode Island who has fought to provide better care for the disabled. “We need to help these struggling families,” he said. “This is a public policy problem about basic human needs not being met.”

Compassion Treatment- Democratic Cue

In the United States today, disabled children and their families struggle to find qualified people to help with their care. The immense suffering experienced by these families, through no fault of their own, has led Democratic Party leaders to propose new ways of helping people with disabilities. Advocates and experts who spoke with U.S. News describe a system in shambles, neglecting to bring relief to people across the country each year. The failure to provide treatment and supportive services to people with disabilities—both in the community and in hospitals—has left untreated patients and their families without necessary help, says Mike Kennedy, a former Democratic congressman from Rhode Island who has fought to provide better care for the disabled. “We need to help these struggling families,” he said. “This is a public policy problem about basic human needs not being met.”

The non-compassion frame and the compassion frames each described the same issue, but only the compassion frames clearly employed compassionate language, such as the words, “struggle,” “suffering” and, “relief,” among other phrases. All conditions were roughly equal in length (140 or 142 words) with minimal word changes in order to isolate the desired effect of compassionate language. Finally, the three compassion conditions only differed from one another in whether or not they included party cues.

Because I found in a prior study that the results for the two dependent variables were not meaningfully different, I combined the two items into a single measure of preferences about disability policy.

Results

Manipulation Check

After reading the news story, participants first answered an open-ended question

asking them what came to mind about disability policy. This served as a check on whether the compassion frames had the desired effect of bringing compassionate considerations to mind. The specific question was, “After reading this article, what comes to mind about how you feel about the issue of disability?” Subjects were provided with a text box to write their answers.

The results of the manipulation check suggest that the compassion conditions made compassionate considerations more available for the subjects. I coded as compassionate language statements that expressed feeling concerned or a desire to help. Such compassionate responses included such remarks as, “heartbreaking,” “People should be worried about what's going on in our communities these are our home towns that need love and support,” and “I feel that we need to help the disabled. Many people can't help that they have a disability because that's how they were born. others had tragic events happen to them. it is our job to help these people.” About 36 percent of respondents in the compassion conditions reported experiencing compassion in their open-ended responses. This was significantly greater than the 27 percent in the non-compassion condition.

Notably, many of the compassion-oriented responses referenced the lack of control that disabled individuals had over their plights. This further points to the importance of perceptions of control in experiencing compassion. On the flip side, other responses were decidedly uncompassionate. As one person stated, “it is what it is.” Another participant said, “The parents of the disabled children made their own choice to keep them, they should pay for it themselves.” In the last instance, one subject attributed a high degree of individual control over the plights associated with having a

disability, although this was not a common argument even among the uncompassionate open-ended responses.

As noted, a full 27 percent of responses in the non-compassion group also mentioned being concerned about or wanting to help those with disabilities. Hence, it appears that the non-compassion frame also brought compassionate considerations to mind, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree. The relatively high percentage of compassionate responses in the non-compassion condition suggests it might be challenging to find statistically significant differences between the treatments. I return to this point in the discussion following the results.

Support for Disability Policy by Treatment Group

Turning to the results of the experiment, it is first useful to examine the average levels of support for increased assistance to the disabled in each treatment condition. Table 18 provides the means for each condition, with separate columns for Republican and Democratic identifiers.

TABLE 18 Support for Disability Policy by Treatment Group, Means

<i>Support for the Disabled, Means</i>	Republicans	Democrats
Non-Compassion Condition	0.694	0.825
Compassion Treatment, Non-Partisan Cue	0.711	0.815
Compassion Treatment, Republican Cue	0.732	0.818
Compassion Treatment, Democratic Cue	0.705	0.822

Most notably, Democratic identifiers’ average levels of support for disability policy are extremely high in all conditions. Among Democrats, the average support for the disabled is consistently around 0.82 on a 0 to 1 scale with no statistically meaningful differences between the conditions. The widest difference in means is between the non-

compassion condition is only 0.010 and is not statistically significant. It appears that there may be a ceiling effect among Democrats.

For Republicans, the differences in overall means are substantively larger but only one reaches conventional levels of statistical significance: the Republican cue. Although the means are high for all treatments, it is highest in the compassionate language with the Republican cue condition. It is lowest in the non-compassion condition. The difference between the two approaches 4 percentage points, which, given the subtlety of the treatment seems meaningful.

Although the treatments do not produce statistically significant shifts in policy attitudes with the exception of the Republican cue, I designed the experiment to test whether the use of a compassionate frame made dispositional compassion more influential in informing people's preferences about disability. The real test of the experiment, then, is to determine whether or not compassion's effect increased in the compassion treatments compared to the non-compassion condition.

Influence of Compassion on Disability Policy Preferences, By Treatment

To test the effect of compassion on participants' views about disability in the different treatment groups versus the non-compassion group, I estimate an OLS regression to assess the effect of compassion on the dependent variables, while controlling for other potentially influential variables. In the model explaining preferences for disability policy, I include measures of compassion, partisanship, gender, ideology, race, income, and a dummy variable for strong partisanship. I also include a measure of whether the respondent reported having a close friend or family member with a disability.

I recoded all variables to range from 0 to 1. The lowest level of income and age

are coded as 0 and the highest as 1. To measure race and gender, I use dummy variables so that African American equals 1 and all other races equal 0; female equals 1 and male equals 0. The respondent's self-placement on the ideological scale ranges from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, where the most liberal is coded as 0 and the most conservative is coded as 1. Partisan affiliation is captured by dummy variables for Democrat and Republican. I also include a dummy variable to measure strong partisans, where 1 equals a Strong Democrat or Strong Republican, and 0 equals all other participants. Participants also answered a question about their personal experience with disability since that might influence support for government assistance for the disabled. Specifically, participants answered the question, "Do you have a close friend or family member who has a physical or mental disability?" with the responses options, "Yes," "No," or "Don't know." To measure compassion, participants answered how much they agreed with the two items from the General Social Survey that I have used in previous chapters, as well a new item. Recall that the two items from the GSS are, "People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate," and, "These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others." In addition, I include a third item that tracks closely the conceptual definition of compassion, specifically: "When people are in need, I feel concerned and wish for their problem to be improved." Responses were measured on 1-5 scales, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." I combined the three items additively (with the second item reverse-coded) and scaled the measure from 0-1 to create a measure of dispositional compassion.

In addition, I include several dummy variables to account for which treatment the respondent received. Importantly, I included an interaction between each treatment and

my measure of compassion: Compassion X Non-partisan cue, Compassion X Republican Cue and Compassion X Democratic Cue. The main effect of compassion captures the effect of compassion in the non-compassionate condition. The effect of compassion in the treatment conditions are captured by that coefficient plus the coefficient for the respective interactions.

Positive coefficients for the independent variables indicate greater support for the disabled. If the treatment had the hypothesized effect, respondents' compassion ought to have a greater influence on their support for government assistance for the disabled when they are exposed to the compassion frame than when they are exposed to the non-compassion frame. Moreover, this effect should be larger for partisans who read the news story containing cues from elites of their party.

The results appear in Table 19. The first column contains the results of the regression for all respondents, the second column contains the results for Democrats, and the third column contains the results for Republicans, including independent "leaners" for both parties.

TABLE 19 Support for Disability Public Policy

	All	Democrats	Republicans
Compassion	0.396* (0.043)	0.323* (0.061)	0.391* (0.076)
Nonpartisan Treatment	-0.067 (0.045)	-0.143* (0.064)	-0.058 (0.079)
Nonpartisan Treatment X Compassion	0.090 (0.060)	0.184* (0.082)	0.084 (0.108)
Democratic Treatment	-0.060 (0.046)	-0.056 (0.070)	-0.110 (0.082)
Democratic Treatment X Compassion	0.076 (0.062)	0.071 (0.089)	0.132 (0.111)

Republican Treatment	-0.072 (0.045)	-0.024 (0.065)	-0.107 (0.080)
Republican Treatment X Compassion	0.103* (0.059)	0.033 (0.084)	0.183* (0.109)
Female	0.012 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.010)	0.004 (0.013)
Black	0.038* (0.012)	0.023* (0.012)	0.049 (0.037)
Income	-0.069* (0.014)	-0.049* (0.020)	-0.082* (0.026)
Ideology	-0.148* (0.015)	-0.041* (0.022)	-0.230* (0.026)
Age	-0.047* (0.015)	-0.010 (0.020)	-0.057* (0.028)
Personal Experience	0.052* (0.007)	0.058* (0.010)	0.057* (0.014)
Strong Partisan	0.013* (0.008)	0.033* (0.010)	0.013 (0.013)
Democrat	0.042* (0.010)	---	---
Republican	0.011 (0.010)	---	---
Constant	0.516* (0.035)	0.555* (0.049)	0.590* (0.061)
<i>N</i>	2644	1062	945
<i>R</i> ²	0.282	0.220	0.272

Source: Survey Sampling International Study, fielded
November 2015 OLS Coefficients; All variables scaled 0-1
*p<.05

The main effect of compassion, which captures its effect in the non-compassion condition, is statistically significant and substantively large for both Republican and Democratic respondents. The most compassionate Democrats are 32 percentage points more in support of government assistance to the disabled than the least compassionate

Democrats, and for Republicans that difference is 39 percentage points. Strikingly, compassion affects preferences about this policy more than any other factor in the model, including ideology, partisanship, or the effect of having a friend or family member with a disability. The pattern is similar to that of compassion's effects on charitable giving outlined in Chapter 3. This might be because, when elites do not diverge in how much they connect an issue to compassion, compassion affects preferences in that domain similarly across mass partisans.

Notably, ideology is only predictive of Republican preferences in the model, where the most conservative Republicans are 23 percentage points more opposed to government assistance to the disabled than the most liberal Republicans.

Turning to the treatments, the results illustrate that Republicans respond, as expected, most strongly in terms of compassion in the presence of a compassionate cue provided from a co-partisan political elite. The estimate for the interaction between compassion and the Republican cue treatment (0.183) suggests that the compassionate language from a Republican elite boosts the already large effect of compassion in the non-compassion condition (0.391) by roughly 18 percentage points. Indeed the total effect of compassion in the Republican treatment condition suggests that moving from least to most compassionate increases support for the disabled by a full 57 percentage points. Contrast this to the effect of having a close friend or family with a disability: personal experience with a disability increases support for disability policy by only 6 percentage points on average. Compassion's influence after receiving a compassionate cue by a Republican elite is 9 times as large. Other variables have similarly modest effects relative to compassion's effect. Age has a statistically significant and negative

effect among Republican identifiers but its substantive impact is only about 6 percentage points. Republicans with higher incomes also express less support for the disabled than those with low incomes. While this difference is only 8 percentage points, its effect is nearly twice as strong for Republicans as it is for Democrats.

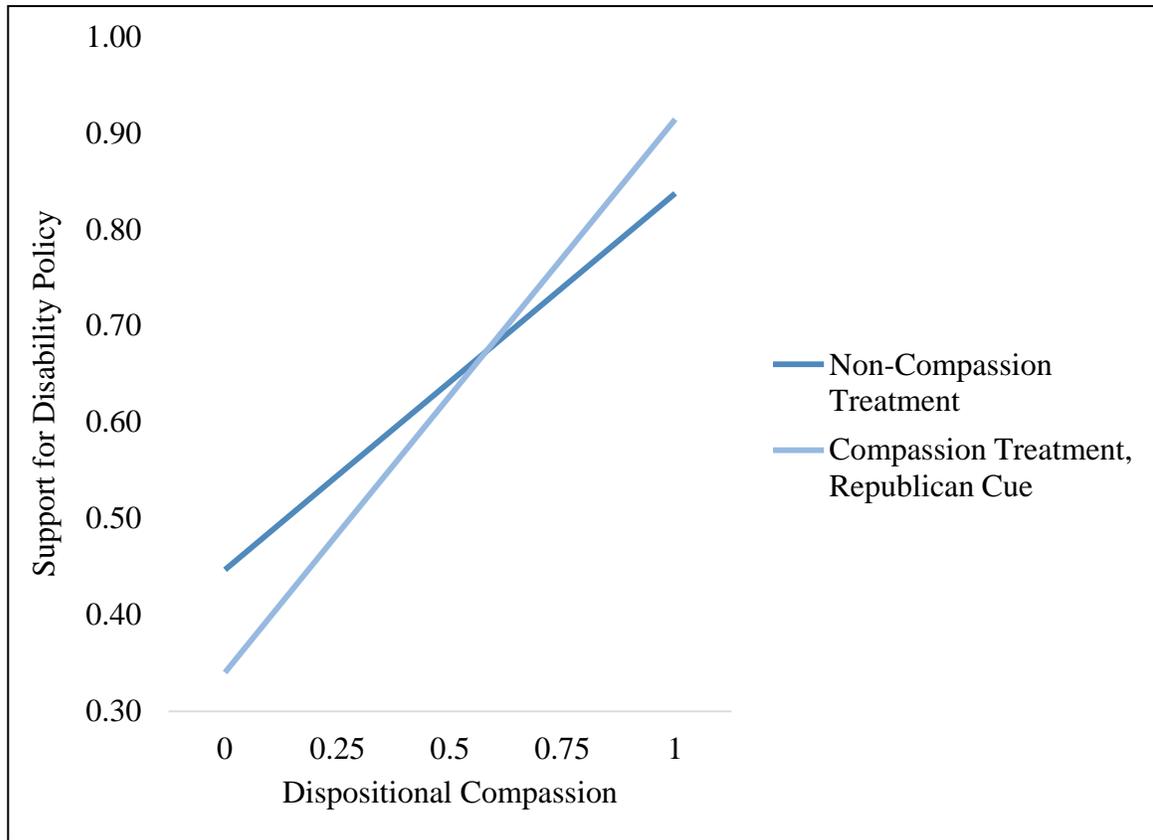
The treatments have little effect on the influence of compassion for Democratic identifiers in the study. Democrats responded most to the nonpartisan treatment, increasing the effect of compassion by another 18 percentage points above its already large effect (0.323) in the non-compassion condition. However, recall that Democrats' average support for the disabled was actually lower in the compassion condition with a non-partisan cue than it was in the non-compassion condition. This effect actually suggests that the low and middle compassion Democrats become less supportive in the non-partisan treatment group than in the non-compassion condition. It is also important to note that Democrats' levels of support for the disabled in all conditions were very high: an average of 0.82 on a 0 to 1 measure. As a result, the treatments had less room to influence preference formation. For Republicans, the means were significantly lower in the non-compassion condition, at 0.694. The results reveal that appeals to compassion made compassion more relevant to Republican identifiers' opinions, particularly when such appeals came from an in-party source.

Turning to the rest of the model for Democrats, the results show that being African-American and being a strong partisan have substantively small but statistically reliable effects in boosting support for the disabled. And, wealthier Democrats and more conservative Democrats exhibit relatively small but statistically reliable lower levels of support. In addition, Democratic identifiers who have personal experience

with a disabled family member or friend are about six percentage points more in favor of support for disability policy. Again, all these effects pale compared with the effect of compassion.

To better illustrate this pattern of results, I graph the impact of compassion across its range in Figure 4. Because the treatment primarily influenced Republicans, I graph compassion's effect on their preferences only. I calculate Republican identifiers' predicted scores in the condition with a compassion appeal and a Republican cue compared to their predicted scores in the non-compassion condition. To generate the scores, I plug the modal scores for the independent variables into the regression model, multiplying them by the relevant coefficients.

FIGURE 4 Effect of Compassion on Increased Support for the Disabled, Republicans Only



The results in Figure 4 indicate that compassionate rhetoric can, in fact, enhance the effect of dispositional compassion to guide their political opinions. In that sense, the results suggest that the experimental manipulation does what it was designed to do: it makes compassion a more relevant consideration for determining one's attitudes.

Compassionate appeals endorsed by an in-party elite increases support among those at the middle and high levels of dispositional compassion, while actually dampening support among low compassion respondents who make up a much smaller percentage of the sample.

Significantly, high compassion Republicans (those who score 0.8 and above) who receive the Republican cue have average levels of support for the disabled at levels

comparable or greater than average Democrats, at a range between 0.80 to 0.91 on the dependent variable. This is substantively very important. The effect of compassion on Republican identifiers when compassion is cued by a Republican erases the difference between Republicans and Democrats in their support for the disabled among those who score near the maximum of compassion.

Conclusion

The experiment establishes that compassionate appeals can increase the degree to which individuals connect considerations of compassion to their political views. In examining disability policy specifically, I find that, absent an appeal, mass partisans are similarly moved by compassion for a group that is perceived as having low internal control and is the target of a policy not central to political contestation. Indeed, an individual's concern for others has a much larger effect on disability policy preferences than ideology or party affiliation. Compassionate appeals make compassion even more central to policy preferences about disability, at least among Republicans. When highly compassionate Republicans read a compassionate appeal by a Republican leader, their preferences about disability policy become indistinguishable from Democrats.

The results illustrate that Republicans' compassion can be connected to politics, particularly if Republican leaders make appeals that frame the issue as a compassion-based issue. The activation of Republican compassion has the capacity to bridge the ideological divide in policy preferences. When elites do not use compassionate language to talk about disability, conservative Republicans' levels of support are, on average, below those of Democrats. When, however, a Republican politician frames disability in

terms of compassion, the difference in the preferences that Republicans and Democrats express about disability shrinks considerably. For high compassion Republicans, the Republican appeal to compassion makes their support for disabled the same as an average Democrat who reads no compassionate appeal.

My theory posits that compassionate language will cause highly compassionate people to be more likely to embrace political views that help others in need. What I did not foresee, however, was that such language would actually prompt low compassion individuals to move in the other direction. Among those who describe themselves as unconcerned with others in need, it seems that appeals that emphasize suffering can cause to them to have even greater opposition to policies that provide assistance.

Although the number of respondents who compose the low compassion group is small, the finding is consistent in this experiment and a prior study. Appealing to compassion is not straightforward a strategic choice for politicians. Even if compassion aligns with the policy platform of the politician making the appeal, he or she runs the risk of increasing opposition to such a policy from small group of individuals.

Finally, the manipulation check suggests the experimental results might be conservative. It appears that the non-compassion group was in a sense “treated” in their version of the stimulus. As evidence, participants reported relatively high experiences of compassion after reading the non-compassion condition. Perhaps this is the reason compassion plays a large role in structuring preferences even absent the compassionate appeal. This means that I did not have a true control with which to compare the compassionate appeal to. I rectify this problem in the next experiment by including a true control condition that contains no message.

Regardless, the evidence still suggest that appeals to compassion make compassion a more influential factor in political preferences about disability policy, at least among Republicans. The results of the experiment strengthen the theory that compassion is universal but that its connection to politics is influenced by the presence of compassionate rhetoric. In the next chapter, I conduct an experiment to examine how varying perceptions of the control of the beneficiary of compassion influences the effectiveness of compassionate appeals. I also assess if such perceptions of controllability influence party identifiers' differently in their likelihood of connecting compassion to their political preferences.

Appendix C Experimental Measures

Independent variables:

Compassion 1

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others

Compassion 2

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate

Compassion 3

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

When people are in need, I feel concerned and wish for their problem to be improved.

Dependent variables:

Disability 1

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

I would be more likely to vote for a candidate who championed government help for disabled people.

Disability 2

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

The government should allocate more funds to help disabled people.

CHAPTER V

AN EXPERIMENT ON COMPASSION AND IMMIGRATION POLICY

In the previous chapter, I began to test my hypotheses about the mechanisms underlying compassion's effect on policy preferences. Recall from Chapter 2 that my content analysis demonstrated that Democratic elites talk about a wide range of issues using compassionate language, while Republican elites are less likely to use such language. The survey work from Chapter 3 suggested that the frequency of compassionate rhetoric mattered, in that Democrats in the electorate used compassion in arriving at their preferences on a range of issues. On the one issue that Republican elites used compassionate language more than Democratic elites, namely abortion, it was Republicans in the electorate that used their propensity to feel compassion to inform their attitudes. In Chapter 4, I assessed compassion's influence on disability policy preferences while experimentally varying for the presence of elite rhetoric about disability. I found some evidence that compassionate rhetoric can increase the effect that compassion has on opinions. This can happen when that rhetoric is employed by an elite of one's own party. Although the pattern of effects was more supportive of my hypotheses relative to Republicans, this might have been because Democrats were so supportive of the disabled in the absence of compassionate language that the experimental manipulation ran into a ceiling. In a general sense, the results provided some evidence that the presence of compassionate language affects opinions.

My theory from Chapter 1, however, suggests that more than the absence or presence of compassionate rhetoric is important in connecting compassion to political preferences. A key element of compassion is whether people deem groups as “deserving” of concern (Goetz et al. 2010; Reyna and Weiner 2001; Petersen et al. 2012). If people see the person in need as undeserving, it is likely to cause anger rather than compassion. Research indicates that conservatives and liberals differ in their tendency to blame victims (Niemi and Young 2016) and to attribute problems to dispositional, rather than external causes (Skittka et al. 2002; Weiner et al. 2010). Specifically, conservatives are more likely than liberals to blame those in need. With that in mind, it seems likely that party leaders have strategic incentives to define who is deserving of compassion. Not only will conservative politicians find it comes more naturally to blame those in need for their plight, they also have a personal understanding of how fellow conservatives in the electorate see the world, further discouraging them from using compassionate rhetoric. Moreover, even if Republican elites do use compassionate language, it might be more difficult to cause their fellow Republicans to accept compassionate appeals.

In that sense, being compassionate toward the disabled is an easy test. Few people would blame the disabled for their disabilities. In most other domains, I argue that the effectiveness of such appeals ought to be contingent upon how the appeals portray the degree of control the recipient in need has over his or her circumstances. In the first experiment, I assessed whether rhetoric could activate compassion for the disabled, a group that is low on the dimension of controllability. Because they do not have control over their disability, disabled Americans are all but universally perceived as deserving of sympathy and concern. When the issue involved a group in need that is

perceived as blameless, compassion structured the views of partisans similarly, and compassionate rhetoric from a Republican bumped up the effect of compassion even higher among Republicans.

I turn now to comparing the influence of compassion for blameless (i.e. deserving) individuals with the influence of compassion when individuals might be perceived as responsible for their plight. I focus specifically on preferences about immigration because the issue can be framed to cause people to consider a potentially blameworthy group (e.g. undocumented immigrants who immigrated as adults) or a blameless group (e.g. undocumented immigrants who immigrated as children). What differentiates these groups are perceptions of controllability. Did people have direct control over the decisions they made in coming to the U.S. illegally or did they find themselves here for reasons that were completely beyond their control?

In this chapter, I examine whether rhetoric alone can activate compassion or if the political definition of a group's worthiness—and specifically the control they have over their plight—affects whether or not compassionate language can activate compassion. For Democratic identifiers, immigration has been framed consistently by their leaders as a compassion-based issue. Republican Party elites, on the other hand, have highlighted other considerations pertaining to the issue, particularly law and order and security concerns. As a consequence, compassion ought to structure Democratic identifiers' immigration policy preferences regardless of whether they read a compassionate appeal in my experiment, although such an appeal might bolster the effect of compassion on their views. For Republicans, however, compassion will not be as easily available to them when they express preferences about immigration. Compassionate rhetoric ought to

be necessary to structure their preferences about immigration policy. Furthermore, the stimulus will need to identify immigrants as low in controllability. Absent such appeals, Republicans are unlikely to connect compassion to their views about immigration policy because a) other considerations are more available or b) their default perception of undocumented immigrants is that they are unworthy of compassion.

I expect, then, that compassionate appeals for an individual who has immigrated illegally as an adult (high control condition) will be less effective at activating compassion among Republicans than appeals for an immigrant who came to the United States as a child (low control condition). For Democrats, the two different appeals should have roughly the same effect. Indeed, such appeals might be unnecessary because, for them, elites may have made compassion chronically available. If this is the case, it lends credence to the theory that it is not merely the presence of compassionate rhetoric that matters but also that recipients are not in control of their circumstances, making them deserving of compassion.

Compassionate Appeals and Immigration Policy

Unlike disability policy, immigration is a politically divisive issue. It is arguably one of the most contentious issues in American politics today. The two parties have staked out clear stances about immigration: the Republican Party supports tougher immigration laws, while the Democratic Party is more favorable to paths to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and their families. These differences appear to be motivated by different philosophies toward government and different electoral incentives. For liberal Democratic elites, immigrants are “innocent children needing nurturance,”

while, to conservative Republican elites, they are “lawbreakers” (Lakoff 1996, 188). In addition to these different philosophical orientations, there are different electoral incentives for the parties to use more or less compassionate language in regards to immigration. Racial minorities, a greater percentage of which are affected by immigration policies, vote for the Democratic Party in increasingly large numbers. For instance in 2012, 71 percent of Latino voters and 77 percent of Asian-American voters voted for the Democratic presidential nominee (Source: Pew Research Center; AALDEF Multilingual Exit Poll). Although the Republican Party has found it more difficult to win national elections without winning over some of these voters, it has, so far, not adapted its policy positions to meet this challenge. It follows that Democrats would use compassionate rhetoric about immigration policy. Republicans, by contrast, are overwhelmingly white and many express opposition to immigration. This ought to cause Republican elites to refrain from using compassionate rhetoric about undocumented immigrants, and, instead, to portray them as undeserving of compassion.²⁵

These differences ought to lead party identifiers to diverge in their connection of compassion to the issue of immigration policy. This is what I found in my survey analysis in Chapter 3. Democrats’ preferences about immigration policy are structured to some degree by their propensities toward compassion; for Republicans’ compassion does not structure their views at all in this area. The experiment tests whether such

²⁵ For instance, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee has not attempted to appeal to pro-immigration policy voters. In his presidential campaign announcement, Donald Trump stated, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending the best. They’re not sending you... they’re sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime. They’re rapists and some, I assume, are good people, but I speak to border guards and they’re telling us what we’re getting.”

compassion can be connected to Republicans' views if they are exposed to compassionate rhetoric about immigrants who had no control of why they are in the country illegally.

My experimental manipulation draws on the rhetoric elites have used recently about immigration and controllability. Recall that in my content analysis in Chapter 2, Democratic Party leaders distinguished between deserving and undeserving undocumented immigrants. Democrats specifically appealed to compassion for the children of undocumented immigrants, drawing attention to their lack of control in immigrating. In addition, recently Republican presidential hopeful Marco Rubio appealed to compassion for immigrants, although he was not sure sympathy should lead to policy change: "Now, I am sympathetic to the plight of someone who came here when they were 2 or 3 years old through no fault of their own, but you can't solve it doing something that is unconstitutional. No matter how sympathetic we may be to a cause, we cannot violate the Constitution of the United States the way this president now does on a regular basis." (Republican Presidential Debate, Houston, TX, February 25, 2016). Rubio seemed to believe that Republican identifiers would experience compassion with the framing that he suggested. This informed my thinking in ultimately adopting a very similar frame to appeal to compassion for a low control recipient.

Experimental Design

In the experiment that follows, subjects are randomly assigned to one of three conditions: no frame, a compassion frame describing a person who had control over her decision to immigrate (immigrated as an adult), or a compassion frame describing a person who had no control over her decision to immigrate (immigrated as a child).

To conduct my experiment, I used Qualtrics to implement the study. The Qualtrics team then used a company called TapResearch to collect the sample. The sampling technique drew an equal number of Republican and Democratic subjects, a total of 801 identifying with each party including Independents who leaned either Republican or Democrat. Compared with the general population, the sample had a larger percentage of females, at 62 percent of respondents, and a larger percentage of whites, at 78 percent of the respondents. Only 7 percent of the sample identified as black, 7 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 4 percent identified as Asian. The mean age in the subject pool was 37 years old. The mean income level was \$63,000, and the mean education level was a 2 year college degree. In contrast to the GSS surveys and the first experiment, I found a statistically and substantively significant difference between Republicans and Democrats on the compassion measure, about 9 percentage points. On the 0-1 compassion scale, Democrats' average score was 0.71, and Republicans average score was 0.62. Given the experimental design, however, these differences by party should not have much effect on the results.

Dependent Variables

The study includes two primary dependent variables to measure immigration policy preferences. It also includes a third dependent immigration-related variable about the specific person described in the mock news story that serves as my experimental stimulus. Respondents in all conditions answered the same dependent variables except that the control group did not receive the question specific to the vignette because those in the control did not receive the vignette. The first dependent variable was the same as an item asked on the 2014 General Social

Survey. Respondents answered how much they agreed with the following question, “America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.” Second, they were asked how much they agreed with the statement, “The legal immigration process should be made easier.” Response categories for both items ranged from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” on five-point scales.

For the treatment conditions only, respondents answered a question about an individual that was referred to in the treatment. Specifically, they were asked, “Which comes closer to your view about the status of Rosa Torres and her family who are now living in the U.S.?” with two possible response options: “They should not be allowed to stay in this country legally” or “They should be able to stay in the country legally, if certain requirements are met.” Respondents were then given a follow up question: “How strongly do you feel that way? Very strongly, moderately, or a little?” The measure was coded to range from feeling very strongly that Rosa and her family should not be allowed to stay in the country legally to feeling very strongly that they should be able to, if certain requirements were met. This constituted a 6 point scale.

Pretest

To design the experimental manipulation, I first conducted a pre-test of three different possible mock news stories. The pre-test assessed partisan differences in perceptions of controllability of the individual described in the experimental treatments. This allowed me to choose which treatments best induced perceptions of low versus high controllability for identifiers of both parties. This was particularly important for

Republican identifiers, as I expected that perceiving low controllability would be especially important to activate Republicans' compassion.

I conducted the pre-test in three undergraduate classes at a southern university. At the end of a lecture, the instructor passed out a one page document to each student that contained one of three possible treatment conditions. After reading the short paragraph, the pre-test subjects answered how much control they thought the person described in the vignette had over her decision to immigrate, rating her level of control from 1 to 10. Underneath that rating, the participants were provided a blank space to explain their rationale. At the bottom of the sheet, participants noted their partisan affiliation and gender. The pre-test took subjects less than two minutes to complete.

My aim was to determine the conditions for which Democrats and Republicans perceived similar and different degrees of control. The pre-test included one of three conditions: two of what I expected to be low control frames and a single high control frame. The first low control frame described a woman who had immigrated due to unsafe conditions in her home country. The second described a woman who had immigrated with her parents at the age of 2 years old. Both these descriptions contained phrases about the woman's lack of control in immigrating. The high control condition, in contrast, contained language about the woman making a choice to immigrate. Specifically, it described a woman who decided to immigrate because the official way would have taken too long. Table 20 provides the conditions I examined in the pre-test. The final conditions differ slightly from the two below that were selected for the experiment. I provide the text of the final treatments in the next section.

TABLE 20 Pre-Test Conditions

<p>High control condition:</p> <p>In a speech yesterday morning, former congressman Evan Tompkins advocated new legislation on behalf of undocumented immigrants, calling it a, “crisis that requires compassion and humane solutions.” In the speech, the congressman described the story of Rosa Torres, a young woman living in Nashville, Tennessee. Because the official way would take too long, Rosa found herself making the decision to immigrate to the United States ten years ago without going through the legal immigration process. Since she chose to immigrate by a different path, Rosa faces the prospect of her family being torn apart. She also lacks access to needed services. Educational delays, health problems, and trouble entering the workforce are just some of the struggles Rosa and many millions like her face while growing up “in the shadow of the law.”</p>
<p>Low control condition-Personal safety:</p> <p>In a speech yesterday morning, former congressman Evan Tompkins advocated new legislation on behalf of undocumented immigrants, calling it a, “crisis that requires compassion and humane solutions.” In the speech, the congressman described the story of Rosa Torres, a young woman living in Nashville, Tennessee. Because her personal safety was in danger, Rosa found herself forced to immigrate to the United States ten years ago without going through the legal immigration process. Since she had no choice but to immigrate by a different path, Rosa faces the prospect of her family being torn apart. She also lacks access to needed services. Educational delays, health problems, and trouble entering the workforce are just some of the struggles Rosa and many millions like her face while growing up “in the shadow of the law.”</p>
<p>Low control condition-Immigrated when child:</p> <p>In a speech yesterday morning, former congressman Evan Tompkins advocated new legislation on behalf of undocumented immigrants, calling it a, “crisis that requires compassion and humane solutions.” In the speech, the congressman described the story of Rosa Torres, a woman living in Nashville, Tennessee. Rosa did not go through the legal immigration process when she came here with her family at the age of two years old. Since she immigrated by a different path, Rosa faces the prospect of her family being torn apart, through no fault of her own. She also lacks access to needed services. Educational delays, health problems, and trouble entering the workforce are just some of the struggles Rosa and many millions like her face while growing up “in the shadow of the law.”</p>

Table 21 illustrates the average level of control that respondents ascribed to Rosa Torres in the three different conditions. The means are separated out by Republican and Democrat subjects, with party leaners included in each party.

TABLE 21 Pre-Test Results

“On a scale of 1-10 how much control do you think Rosa Torres had over immigrating to the United States?”	Perceptions of Control Means	
	Republicans	Democrats
Low control- Personal safety	6.15	3.24
Low control- Immigrated when child	1.91	1.43
High control	6.00	3.90

Democrats and Republicans had similar perceptions about the controllability of the individual who was described as coming to the U.S. as a child, although Democrats, as expected, attributed even less control to the individual. Both Democrats and Republicans rated the level of controllability as less than 2 on a 1 to 10 scale, with Democrats about a half point lower. Indicative of the general sense of open ended responses, one respondent wrote as her reason for rating Rosa as having little control: “When you’re two years old, there really is no way to have any control over what your parents are doing...”

In contrast, I found a large partisan gap in perceptions of control about the other low control frame. Democrats deemed an immigrant who fled unsafe living conditions to have little control, with an average of about 3 on a 1 to 10 scale. As one Democratic subject reasoned, “She was in danger. Likely due to circumstances outside of her control. She only had control over her very natural choice to do what was necessary (though illegal) to survive.” Republican subjects, on the other hand, tended to perceive the person in the “personal safety” low control condition as having a relatively high degree of control, attributing to her an average level of control of about 6 out of 10. The fact that the Republican mean was nearly twice as high as the Democratic mean was quite

striking. The reasoning was equally striking. As one Republican subject wrote in her explanation of why she thought Rosa had a high degree of control, “‘She had no choice’ but to break the laws of the country she wanted to immigrate to? NO sympathy.”

Based on these results, I included in my experiment the child condition as the low controllability condition because partisans were roughly the same in how much control they perceived the person in the vignette to have. The story describing an immigrant fleeing unsafe conditions led to different perceptions of control and would thus be less likely to move partisans of different stripes equally to experience compassion.

The high controllability condition revealed larger political differences than I expected. Here, it appeared that, even when explicitly stating that Rosa “chose” and “found herself making the decision” to immigrate, Democrats still attributed a relatively low degree of controllability to her decision, an average of about 4 on the 1 to 10 scale. For instance, one subject who designated a low level of control to Rosa Torres stated that, “The process is entirely inaccessible, particular to immigrants of color.” Republicans were more likely to perceive Rosa as having a high degree of control in the high control condition, averaging a 6 on the scale. For instance, one student wrote, “There are plenty of other countries to immigrate to. A lot of other countries also have easier immigration laws.” In designing the experiment, I ultimately accepted a degree of partisan difference regarding this treatment condition and took these differences into account when interpreting the results.²⁶

²⁶The partisan differences in perceptions of control seem to be motivated by different assumptions about what circumstances would lead someone to immigrate without going through the legal process.

Experimental Manipulation

To recap, participants in the experiment were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a control group (no article), an article that emphasizes a low control condition, or an article that emphasizes a high control condition. The final language of the conditions is shown in Table 22. One condition depicts an individual who immigrated illegally as a child, and the other condition depicts an individual who immigrated illegally as an adult. In order to minimize any differences between compassion toward a child and an adult, I describe the individual as currently being the same age in both conditions.

TABLE 22 Experimental Treatments

Control condition: (No treatment)
High controllability condition: In a speech yesterday morning, former congressman Evan Tompkins called for compassion for immigrants and advocated new legislation. In the speech, the congressman described the story of Rosa Torres, a young girl living in Nashville, Tennessee. Rosa left Guatemala ten years ago and immigrated illegally to the United States. While estimates vary, millions of people like Rosa suffer from a lack of needed services. Educational delays, health problems, and trouble entering the workforce are just some of the struggles they face while growing up “in the shadow of the law.” ²⁷ As a result of immigrating here illegally, Rosa and others like her are unable to receive the help they need.
Low controllability condition: In a speech yesterday morning, former congressman Evan Tompkins called for compassion for immigrants and advocated new legislation. In the speech, the congressman described the story of Rosa Torres, a young girl living in Nashville, Tennessee. Rosa’s parents left Guatemala ten years ago and immigrated illegally to the United States. While estimates vary, millions of people like Rosa suffer from a lack of needed services. Educational delays, health problems, and trouble entering the workforce are just some of the struggles they face while growing up “in the shadow of the law.” ²⁸ Through no fault of their own, Rosa and others like her are unable to receive the help they need.

²⁷This sentence is taken from an article about immigration policy (Gavett 2011).

²⁸See footnote 1.

Note that both treatments are equal in length with minimal word changes in order to isolate the desired effects. The only difference between the frames is the portrayal of responsibility or controllability. In the low controllability condition, Rosa is described as having immigrated “through no fault of her own,” while her parents took the action to immigrate. The high controllability condition does not contain a phrase denoting lack of control and instead describes the direct actions Rosa has taken, implying control.

Manipulation Check

The experiment included two questions to measure the effectiveness of the treatments. The first was designed to check that the treatments had evoked compassion. The second was designed to check that the different conditions had evoked different perceptions of controllability. For the first, respondents answered the following question, “In general, how sympathetic would you say you are toward immigrants who are in the United States illegally?” Response options ranged from very sympathetic to very unsympathetic, constituting a 4 point scale. For the second check, just like in the pre-test, participants were asked how much control they thought Rosa had over her decision to immigrate, with responses ranging from 1 (no control) to 10 (total control).

The results of the manipulation checks provide evidence that the treatments worked as intended. Turning to the results of the first item, both treatments appeared to evoke compassion in comparison to the control group. Table 23 provides the mean responses for each condition, broken down by party.

TABLE 23 Sympathy for Immigrants, Means

	All Respondents	Republicans	Democrats
Control (No Treatment)	0.466	0.323	0.619
Low controllability treatment	0.526	0.398	0.663
High controllability treatment	0.524	0.386	0.674

On average, respondents in both of the treatment groups indicated experiencing more sympathy for immigrants than respondents did in the control. For Republicans, the highest mean was among those who read the low controllability treatment (0.398), compared to just 0.323 in the control group. Democrats actually expressed even more sympathy for immigrants after reading the high controllability treatment story (0.674) than they did after reading the low controllability treatment (0.663), although the difference between the two means was not statistically significant. Nonetheless, the primary objective of the manipulation check was to ascertain if the treatments appealed to compassion, and subjects responded with significantly higher mean levels of sympathy for immigrants in both treatment groups than they did in the control group.

In the second manipulation check, respondents in both treatment groups rated the degree of control they thought the individual in the vignette had over her decision to immigrate. Specifically, they answered, “On a scale of 1-10 how much control do you think Rosa Torres had over immigrating to the United States?” The results in Table 24 indicate that the treatments had the desired effect.

TABLE 24 Perceptions of Control, Means

	All	Republicans	Democrats
High controllability treatment	6.37	7.10	5.75
Low controllability treatment	2.94	2.81	3.06

When including all respondents, the average amount of control participants attributed to Rosa Torres in the high controllability treatment was 6.37 on a 1 to 10 scale, compared to an average of 2.94 in the low controllability condition. Similar to the results of the pre-test, Republicans and Democrats attributed roughly the same amount of control to Rosa Torres after reading the low controllability treatment, with means of 2.81 for Republicans and 3.06 for Democrats. In fact, the mean for Republicans is even lower than that for Democrats. In the high controllability conditions, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to reject the notion that Rosa truly had a high degree of individual control, attributing Rosa’s control only an average of 5.75 on a 1 to 10 scale. Republicans were much less generous in their interpretation of conditions, rating her level of control in the high controllability treatment at about 7 on the 1-10 scale. The large difference between partisans here is consistent with the notion that, other things equal, conservatives are more likely to blame “victims” than liberals are.

Results

Having established that the treatments worked as they were designed to, I turn now to the results of the experiment. I first provide participants’ average immigration policy preferences in all treatment conditions, broken down by party. Table 25 contains the means of the two broad immigration policy preference variables as well as those of the variable specific to the vignette. In the table, stars indicate, for the first two variables,

a statistically significant difference in means from the control, and, for the third variable, a statistically significant difference in means from the high controllability condition.

TABLE 25 Immigration Policy Preferences by Treatment Condition

Means, All Variables 0-1	Exclude Immigrants		Make Legal Immigration Easier		Rosa Able to Remain in U.S.	
	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats
Control (No Treatment)	0.761	0.473	0.416	0.640	----	----
High controllability treatment	0.717*	0.406*	0.452	0.661	0.560	0.821
Low controllability treatment	0.701*	0.469	0.451	0.645	0.668*	0.835

Looking first at Republicans’ broad immigration policy preferences, they expressed, on average, more lenient immigration preferences in both treatment groups than in the control, and especially when they read the low controllability compassion appeal. This is as my theory predicted and an important finding. Reading a vignette about Rosa’s *specific* situation caused a change in preferences among Republicans in their *general* views about immigration. The widest difference was in response to the statement that America should take stronger measures to exclude immigrants:

Republicans who received no treatment scored an average of 0.761 in agreement with this item, which ranged from 0 to 1, indicating very high support for more exclusionary policies. Republicans who read the compassionate appeal with the low controllability frame, however, were six percentage points less likely to favor stronger measures to exclude immigrants, responding with an average of 0.701 on the measure. Similarly, Republicans in the low controllability condition were about 3.6 percentage points more

likely than Republicans in the control group to agree that the U.S. should make the legal immigration process easier, although that difference was not statistically significant. The high controllability condition also moved the mean scores for Republicans in a more pro-immigration direction for the “exclude” dependent variable, albeit to a lesser degree than the low controllability condition.

Democrats’ average immigration policy preferences also moved in a more liberal direction after receiving one of the treatments. Oddly, for Democrats, it appears that the high controllability treatment actually moved their average preferences more than the low controllability treatment. The only statistically significant difference for Democrats was on the “exclude” dependent variable for which the high controllability treatment group rated an average agreement of 0.406 and the control condition rated an average of 0.473. The low controllability condition seemed to move Democrats barely, if at all, and its difference from the control condition was not statistically significant. While this finding was unexpected, I speculate below about why this might have occurred.

Turning to the vignette-specific dependent variable, recall that these results only compare the two treatment conditions, because subjects in the control group did not read the vignette about Rosa Torres. As expected, I find that subjects in the low controllability condition were more likely to agree that Rosa and her family should be allowed to remain in the United States, with the difference much larger for Republicans than Democrats. The difference between the low and high controllability conditions was quite large. Republicans in the low controllability condition were almost 11 percentage points more likely to favor Rosa and her family remaining in the U.S. than Republicans in the high controllability condition were. For Democrats, that difference was smaller, an

average of less than 2 percentage points, but this might be because, like in the disability experiment, Democratic support was near a ceiling. The mean for Democrats in both the low and high controllability conditions was in excess of .80.

Taken together, the differences in the average policy preferences reveal that the low controllability condition influenced the opinions of Republicans more than Democrats, which was in keeping with expectations. The default beliefs that Republicans have in their heads about immigration are almost certainly less sympathetic than those of Democrats. I suspect that is because they attribute more control to immigrants' situation than Democrats do. When provided information that differs from that default belief, it has a large effect. In contrast Democrats' default belief almost surely attributes less control to immigrants. As a result it is harder to move their preferences by distinguishing different levels of control. In fact, it appears that the Democrats were only moved in their overall preferences by the high controllability condition, which was unexpected. I address this finding further in the discussion.

Effect of Compassion by Treatment Condition

It is important that I found some change in the means of the dependent variables. However, my theory is more focused on how the different stimuli influence the effect that compassion has on the dependent variables. Because compassion levels are so high across both partisan groups, increasing its effect ought to shrink the difference in preferences between Republicans and Democrats, consistent with what I observed above.

I now analyze the *effects* of compassion on immigration policy preferences in the different treatment conditions. To evaluate my predictions, I analyze the effect of the subjects' propensities toward compassion on their political attitudes about immigration.

If the treatments have the hypothesized effect, Democrats' levels of compassion should influence their support for pro-immigration policies even in the control (no treatment), because this issue is already connected to compassion for Democratic identifiers.

Compassion should be influential for Republicans, however, only when they have read one of the two treatment conditions. Compassion's effect should be larger in the low controllability treatment than in the high, because the object of the policy is deemed more worthy of sympathy when she has less control over her circumstances. That condition specifically provides information portraying the recipients of compassion as worthy, due to their lack of control in the matter of immigrating.

In my model of immigration policy preferences, I include controls for ideology, authoritarianism, and race. To measure race, I use dummy variables so that African American equals 1 and all other races equal 0, and Hispanic equals 1 and all other races equal 0. The respondent's self-placement on the ideology scale ranges from extremely liberal to extremely conservative, where the most liberal is coded as 0 and the most conservative is coded as 1. Respondents also answered the four item authoritarianism battery because past research has demonstrated authoritarianism influences immigration policy preferences (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Subjects read the following, "Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. Listed below are pairs of desirable qualities. Please select which one you think is more important for a child to have." They then chose one of each from the following pairs: independence or respect for elders; obedience or self-reliance; curiosity or good manners; and being considerate or being well behaved.

The study uses the same three items to measure a propensity toward compassion as the experiment in Chapter 4. The three compassion items include two items from the General Social Survey, as well as an additional item that closely tracks the conceptual definition of compassion. The GSS items are, “People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate,” and, “These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others.” The third item is, “When people are in need, I feel concerned and wish for their problem to be improved.” Responses are measured on 1-5 scales, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” I combine these three items additively (with the second item reverse-coded) to create a measure of a compassionate disposition.

I also include interaction terms between each treatment condition and compassion, with the expectation that compassion will have a larger influence on the dependent variables in the treatment conditions than in the control. To account for which treatment the respondent received, I include dummy variables for each of the treatments. I also include an interaction between each treatment and the measure of compassion denoted in the results as: Low Controllability X Compassion and High Controllability X Compassion. The main effect of compassion captures the effect of compassion in the control group. The effects of compassion in the treatment conditions are captured by the coefficient for the main effect plus the coefficient for the respective interactions.

Table 26 provides the results of the model of immigration policy preferences on the two general immigration dependent variables: agreement with making the legalization process easier and opposition to increasing exclusionary immigration policies. The first two columns contain the OLS regression results for Republican identifiers’ preferences

and the second two columns contain the results for Democratic identifiers. Positive coefficients indicate greater support for making the legalization process easier and greater opposition to increasing exclusionary immigration policies.

TABLE 26 Effect of Compassion on Immigration Policy Preferences by Treatment Condition

	<i>Republicans Only</i>		<i>Democrats Only</i>	
	Make Legalization Process Easier	Increase Exclusionary Policies	Make Legalization Process Easier	Increase Exclusionary Policies
Compassion	0.078 (0.083)	-0.084 (0.069)	0.226* (0.088)	-0.308* (0.094)
Low Controllability condition	-0.051 (0.078)	0.024 (0.065)	0.010 (0.091)	0.008 (0.098)
High controllability condition	-0.050 (0.082)	0.025 (0.069)	0.030 (0.089)	-0.069 (0.095)
Low Controllability X Compassion	0.120 (0.119)	-0.128 (0.099)	0.015 (0.123)	-0.031 (0.132)
High Controllability X Compassion	0.128 (0.127)	-0.102 (0.105)	0.010 (0.120)	-0.018 (0.129)
Ideology	0.106* (0.049)	-0.140* (0.041)	0.327* (0.047)	-0.230* (0.050)
Authoritarianism	-0.138* (0.039)	0.044 (0.033)	-0.178* (0.030)	0.186* (0.032)
Black	0.224* (0.076)	-0.125* (0.063)	0.015 (0.029)	-0.028 (0.031)
Hispanic	0.151* (0.049)	-0.108* (0.041)	0.090* (0.031)	-0.115* (0.033)

Constant	0.408* (0.063)	0.841* (0.052)	0.308* (0.075)	0.795* (0.080)
<i>n</i>	779	779	796	794
<i>R</i> ²	0.059	0.059	0.189	0.171

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$

The results reveal that the compassion frames make compassion influential on Republicans' immigration policy preferences. Although the table appears to contain many insignificant coefficients, the total effects of compassion in both the low and high controllability conditions are significantly different from 0. These effects are calculated by adding the main effect of compassion together with the interaction coefficient. In the low controllability treatment group, the most compassionate Republicans are 21 percentage points more in favor, on average, of making the legal immigration process easier and 20 percentage points more opposed to exclusionary immigration measures compared to the least compassionate Republicans. However, the high controllability treatment produces a similar pattern of results. In that condition, the most compassionate Republicans are 21 percentage points more in favor of making the legal immigration process easier and 19 percentage points more opposed to exclusionary immigration measure than the least compassionate Republicans. Contrary to expectations, these results do not provide evidence that portraying the recipient of compassion as having little control over her plight is necessary in order to activate compassion for Republicans, at least when it relates to general preferences about immigration. Compassionate language alone seems to be enough.²⁹

²⁹ However, I find evidence in support of that theory in the results of the vignette-specific dependent variable, detailed below.

For Democrats, compassion is influential in the control condition, and the treatments seem to do little to boost the effects of compassion. In the control group, the most highly compassionate Democrats are, on average, 23 percentage points more likely to favor making the legal immigration process easier and 31 percentage points more likely to oppose increasing exclusionary immigration policies than the least compassionate Democrats are. The fact that compassion influences Democrats' preferences in the control makes sense because Democratic elites commonly frame immigration around considerations of compassion. I speculate that, because Democrats already think about immigration with compassionate considerations in mind, the treatments had less room to have an effect on them.

Other variables in the model also have significant effects, including ideology, authoritarianism and race. More liberal respondents are more in favor of making immigration easier and more opposed to taking stronger measures to exclude immigrants, and this effect is much larger for Democrats. The most liberal Democrats are about 33 percentage points more in favor of making the legalization process easier and 23 percentage points more opposed to taking stronger measures to exclude immigrants than the most conservative Democrats are. Authoritarianism also structures immigration preferences for those of both parties. For example, the most authoritarian Republicans and Democrats are 14 and 18 percentage points, respectively, less in favor of making legal immigration process easier than the least authoritarian, other things being equal. Lastly, black and Hispanic Republicans have more liberal immigration policy preferences on both dependent variables than Republicans of other races. For Democrats, only

Hispanic Americans have statistically different immigration preferences, and the difference is substantively small.

To illustrate these results, I graph four figures, one for each dependent variable for each party, of the effect of compassion across its range in the different treatment groups. To generate the predicted scores, I plug the modal scores for the independent variables into the regression model, multiplying them by the relevant coefficients. Figures 5 and 6 show the effect of Republicans and Democrats' compassion levels on immigration policies depending on what treatment they were assigned.

FIGURE 5A and FIGURE 5B Opposition to America Taking Stronger Measures to Exclude Illegal Immigrants

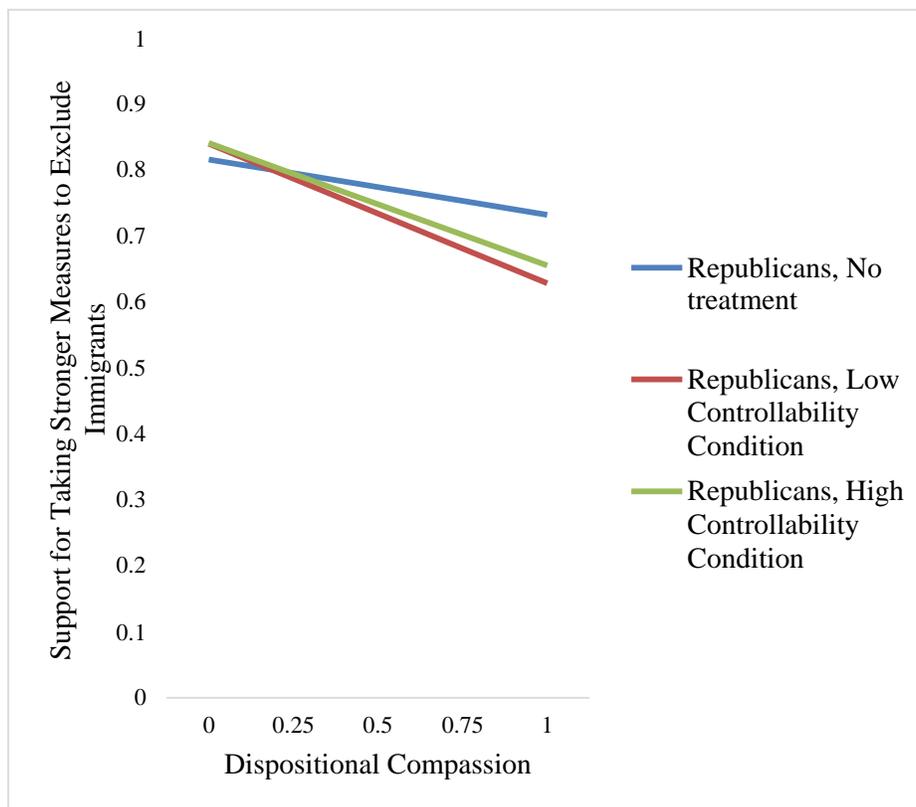
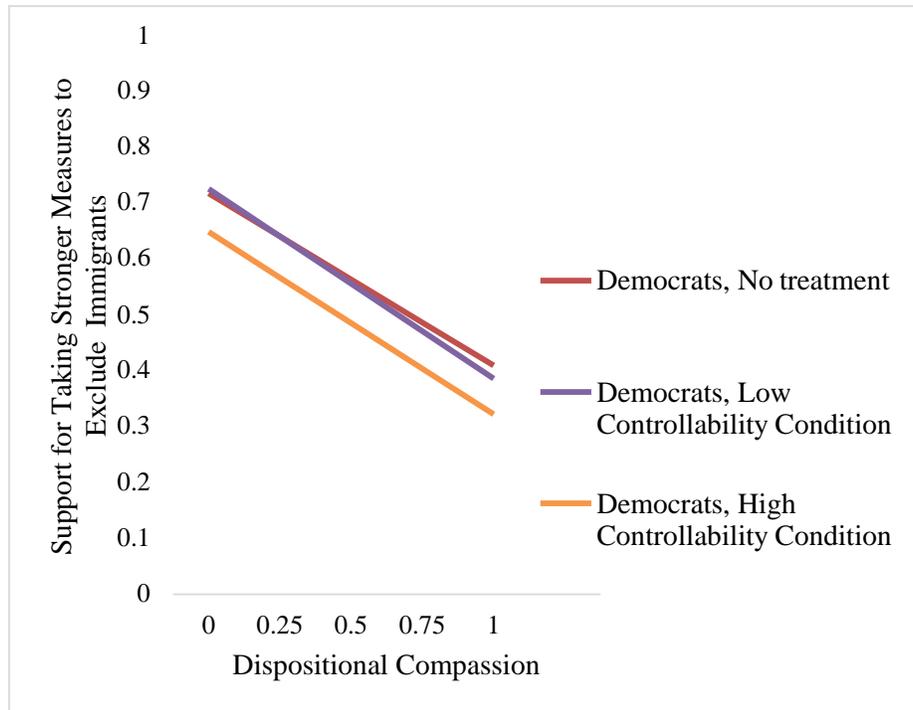
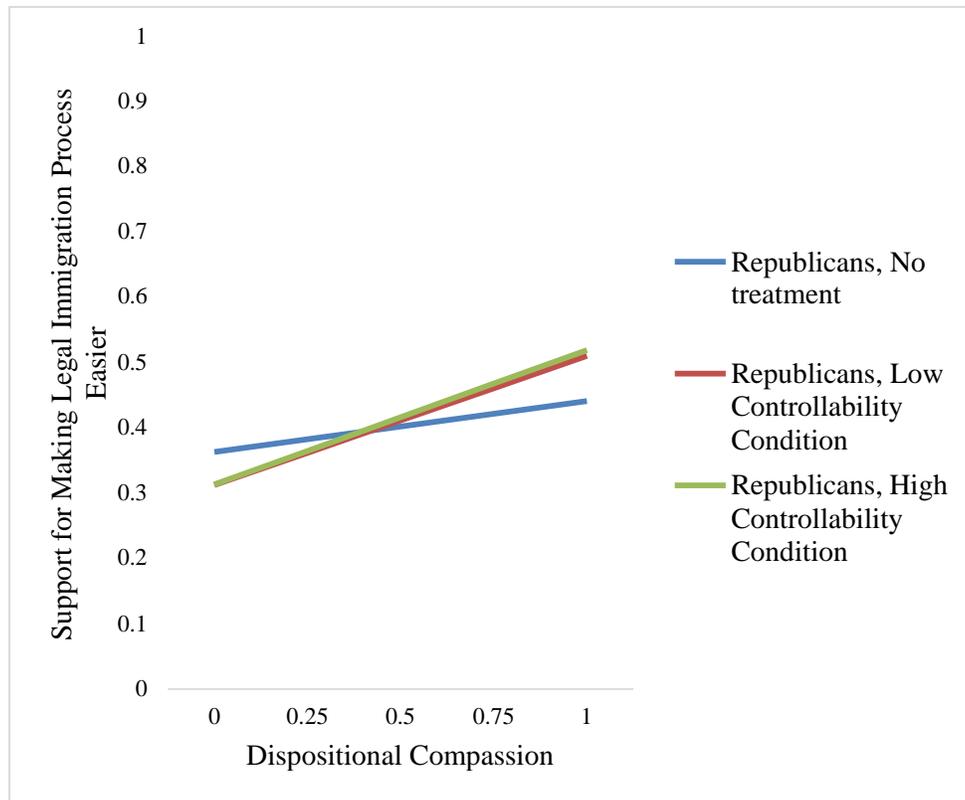
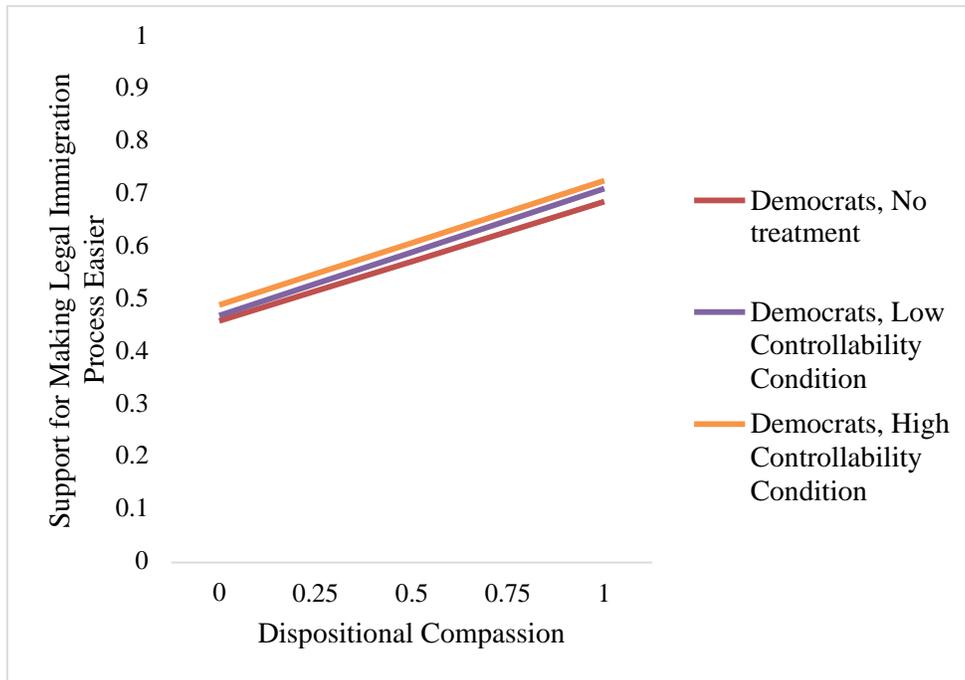


FIGURE 6A and FIGURE 6B Support for Making Legal Immigration Process Easier



Note that the lines for Republicans who received no treatment are close to flat for in both figures, representing the lack of influence of compassion on their immigration preferences in the control group. Both the low and high controllability treatments prompt compassion to be more relevant to Republicans' views, while the treatments do not influence the role of compassion for Democrats. And, in both figures, it is clear that the lines representing the low and high controllability treatments for Republicans have very similar slopes, indicating the largely similar influence of compassion. For Democrats, the effect of compassion is illustrated by a steep line in the control group, and the slope of the line remains similar for Democrats who read the mock news story.

Preferences about Rosa Torres

Thus far, I have examined the influence of the vignette on general preferences about immigration. I next examine its effect on people's opinions about what should happen to Rosa Torres, specifically. I include in the model the same independent variables as above, including measures of compassion, race, authoritarianism, and ideology. Since this question was only asked to the two treatment groups, I make the reference group here the high controllability condition. Thus the model includes an interaction for the Low Controllability Condition X Compassion and a dummy variable for the Low Controllability Condition. The main effect of compassion captures its effect in the high controllability condition. The coefficient on the interaction will reveal whether the effect of compassion is larger or smaller in the low controllability condition. Table 27 illustrates the results of preferences about Rosa and her family, divided by party.

TABLE 27 Effect of Compassion on Preferences about Rosa, by Treatment Condition

Rosa and Family Should be Able to Remain in the United States	<i>Republicans</i>	<i>Democrats</i>
Compassion	0.337* (0.118)	0.479* (0.086)
Low Controllability Condition	0.027 (0.103)	0.251* (0.090)
Low Controllability X Compassion	0.138 (0.158)	-0.347* (0.123)
Ideology	0.164* (0.075)	0.136* (0.058)
Authoritarianism	-0.032 (0.062)	-0.057 (0.037)
Black	-0.024 (0.114)	0.063* (0.036)
Hispanic	-0.011 (0.072)	0.102* (0.041)
Constant	0.305* (0.090)	0.402* (0.075)
<i>n</i>	510	537
<i>R</i> ²	0.083	0.103

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$

I find some support here for the theory that depicting someone in need as not in control of her plight facilitates the activation of compassion among Republican-identifiers. Compassion is more influential on Republicans' support for Rosa and her family in the low controllability condition than it is in the high controllability condition,

although the effect is not sufficiently precise for it to reach statistical significance. Substantively, however, the added effect is quite large. Among Republicans in the high controllability condition, moving from the least to most compassionate predicts that they will be, on average, 34 percentage points more supportive of Rosa. On top of this, the low controllability treatment makes compassion about 14 percentage points more influential on Republicans' preferences about the status of Rosa Torres. Thus, highly compassionate Republicans who read the compassionate treatment with low control cue were about 48 percentage points more supportive of Rosa and her family being able to stay in the United States than the least compassionate Republicans in the same condition.

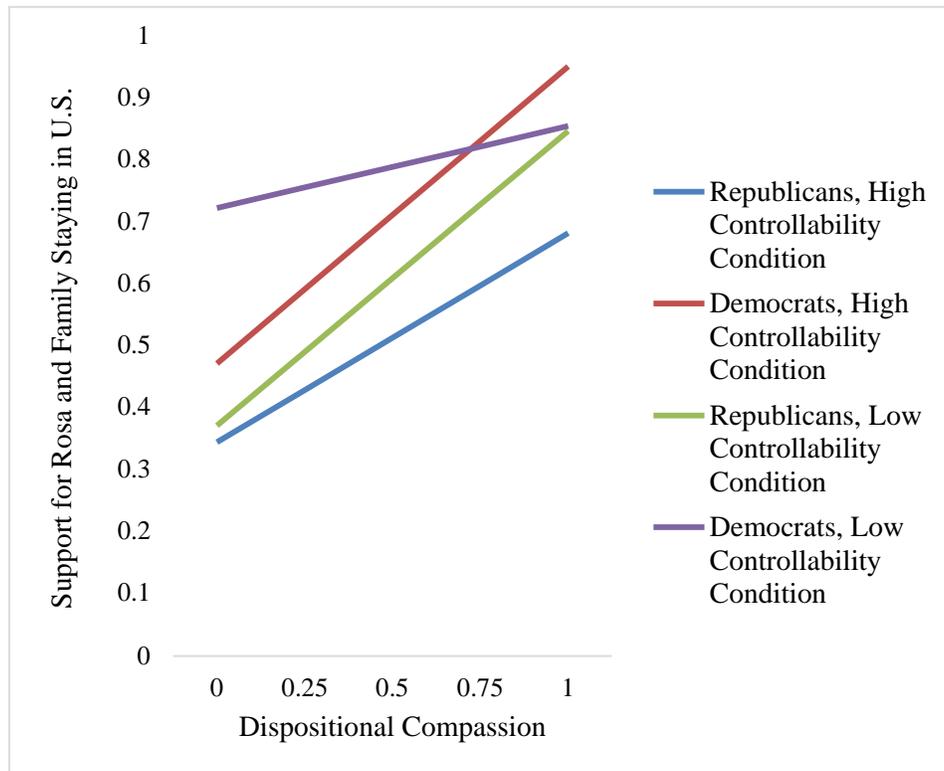
More broadly, the results reveal that compassion has the largest effect for both Democrats and Republicans on their preferences about whether or not Rosa and her family ought to be able to remain in the United States legally. For Democrats, the low controllability treatment actually makes compassion less influential on their preferences regarding the status of Rosa and her family. In the high controllability condition, compared with the least compassionate Democrats, the most compassionate Democrats are about 48 percentage points more supportive of Rosa and her family, and, in the low controllability condition, they are only about 13 percentage points more supportive. As Figure 7 illustrates below, this result is largely due to the fact that, in the low controllability treatment group, even Democrats who are not as prone to compassion are highly supportive of Rosa and her family staying in the country legally.

Ideology plays a similar role for Democrats and Republicans in the model, boosting their support for Rosa and her family an average of about 14 or 16 percentage points, respectively, for the most liberal subjects compared to the most conservative ones.

Interestingly, authoritarianism does not influence preferences about the specific person in the vignette. Race only plays a substantively important role in Democrats' preferences, where Hispanic respondents are 10 percentage points more supportive of Rosa and her family than non-Hispanic respondents.

To illustrate these effects, I graph the results for comparison. To generate predicted scores, I again plug the modal scores for the independent variables into the regression model and multiply them by the relevant coefficients. Figure 7 demonstrates the effect of compassion levels on support for Rosa and her family in the low controllability treatment compared with the high controllability treatment.

FIGURE 7 Support for Rosa and Family to Remain in the U.S. Legally



As noted previously, Republicans are, on average, more supportive of Rosa and her family in the low controllability treatment. In Figure 7, the greater effect of compassion on Republicans in the low controllability condition is represented by the steeper line than the one representing compassion's influence in the high controllability condition. In fact, among medium to highly compassionate Republicans, the low controllability condition prompts their preferences to become very similar to those of Democrats. For Democrats, it appears that the high controllability condition makes compassion more influential primarily by decreasing average support at most levels of dispositional compassion compared to respective support in the low controllability condition. And, at the highest level of compassion, Democrats who read the high control frame are actually more supportive of the specific individual in the news story than the Democrats who read the low control frame are.

Conclusion

The results of the experiment provide additional evidence that elite appeals to compassion can both increase support for the issue the compassionate appeal is connected to and increase the effect of compassion on preferences about the issue. I found that compassionate rhetoric led to relatively small, but statistically significant, changes in overall preferences on immigration, an issue that is highly partisan and hence likely more resistant to change than most other issues. Republicans who read one of the two compassionate appeals were more likely to oppose exclusionary immigration policy than Republicans in the control group were. In addition, I found that among Republicans, compassionate rhetoric about an undocumented immigrant increased the influence of

compassion on support for making the immigration process easier and on opposition to stronger measures to exclude immigrants.

Appeals to compassion seemed to be less consequential for Democrats, at least in the context of this issue and this experiment. Compassionate appeals did not move Democrats' preferences as they did Republicans'. And the use of compassionate language did not seem to boost the effect that compassion had on policy preferences. I think there are good explanations for the null effects for Democrats. It may be that compassionate considerations are already available among Democrats because of the political environment they live in. Chapter 2 demonstrated that Democratic elites used compassionate rhetoric about immigration specifically. In my experiments, it was not as though compassion did not have large effects. Indeed, the results demonstrate that compassion was already highly influential on Democrats' preferences in the control group, and the treatment did not significantly boost the effect of compassion.

The results also suggest that compassionate language alone might be enough to activate compassion among Republicans, as opposed to compassionate rhetoric needing to be combined with depictions of others in need as having low control over their plights. Both the high controllability treatment condition and the low controllability treatment condition made compassion significantly more influential on Republicans' preferences about immigration, and the two conditions did not differ significantly in their effects. It is important to note, though, that both the high and the low controllability conditions used compassionate language.

Yet some of the evidence suggests that controllability might be important. Compassion had a much larger effect on Republicans' preferences in the low

controllability condition on the vignette-specific dependent variable, although the difference was not statistically significant. Substantively, the additional effect of compassion for Republicans in the low controllability condition was as large as that of ideology. Moreover, recall that Republicans' average level of sympathy in the manipulation check was highest in the low controllability condition. These two results indicate that controllability might be important to understanding the effectiveness of compassionate appeals.

Surprisingly, Democrats were actually more supportive of liberal immigration policies in the high controllability group than in the low controllability group. Psychology research points to only a partial explanation for this. Liberals are more likely than conservatives to support policies that assist those described as responsible for their plight (Skittka et al. 2002). In light of this, it is perhaps less surprising that Democrats in the study were willing to support more lenient immigration policies when they read a compassionate appeal that portrayed an individual as having caused her plight. Yet, this does not explain why the low controllability compassionate appeal was less influential on Democrats' preferences. This is something to explore in future research.

In sum, the experimental results demonstrated again that compassion is an important variable in understanding public opinion. For Democrats, across all treatment conditions, and, for Republicans, when compassionate appeals were made, the effect of compassion on immigration preferences tended to be very large, often larger than any other variables in my models. In the next chapter, I synthesize the results of the two experiments, explaining the implications for compassion's role in politics. I then turn to

outlining future research that can further illuminate the role of compassion in explaining political preferences.

Appendix D Experimental Measures

Independent variables:

Compassion 1

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

These days people need to look after themselves and not overly worry about others

Compassion 2

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

People should be willing to help others who are less fortunate

Compassion 3

Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

When people are in need, I feel concerned and wish for their problem to be improved.

Authoritarianism

Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. Listed below are pairs of desirable qualities. Please select which one you think is more important for a child to have.

Independence

Respect for elders

Obedience

Self-reliance

Curiosity

Good manners

Being considerate

Being well behaved

Manipulation Check 1

In general, how sympathetic would you say you are toward immigrants who are in the United States illegally?

Very sympathetic

Somewhat sympathetic

Somewhat unsympathetic

Very unsympathetic

Manipulation Check 2

Thinking back to the article you read, on a scale of 1-10 how much control do you think Rosa Torres had over immigrating to the United States?

- 1- Absolutely no control
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
10. Complete control

Dependent Variables

Rosa

Which comes closer to your view about the status of Rosa Torres and her family who are now living in the U.S.?

They should not be allowed to stay in this country legally.

They should be able to stay in the country legally, if certain requirements are met.

How strongly do you feel that way? Very strongly, moderately, or a little?

Please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements:

Legal

The legal immigration process should be made easier.

Exclude

America should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.

CHAPTER VI

COMPASSION AND AMERICAN POLITICS

Throughout this dissertation I have asked—and begun to answer—several questions about compassion’s influence in political life. Moreover, this undertaking has led me to even more questions to address in the future. In this chapter, I provide an overview of what I have learned so far and identify a few of the areas for future research. I also assess some of the implications of my findings. Lastly, I touch briefly on the role of compassion in the 2016 presidential election.

Overview

In the first part of the dissertation, I explained why I think studying compassion’s role in politics is important. Drawing from scholarship in biology, psychology, and philosophy, I argued that compassion is an innate and powerful predictor of human behavior. By contrasting compassion to other related concepts, I demonstrated that compassion is the most applicable—and the most important—to the study of politics. Compassion specifically entails concern for others in need, and it leads to preferences to see that others’ welfare is improved. In public opinion, these preferences take the form of favoring certain policies.

I next detailed my theory about the importance of elite rhetoric in making compassion relevant to citizens. Elites often use compassionate rhetoric in their speeches, indicating they believe it is an important political tool. And, I find that the public is similarly inclined toward compassion. Yet in survey questions about

compassion for specific groups in American society, wide partisan divisions exist. Because compassion is specifically about others in need, I argued that elites are critical to defining and highlighting who is in need in order to frame issues in compassionate terms. Given the centrality of partisanship, it follows that compassion ought to be more influential on mass partisans' views about an issue when elites of their party have used language to prompt considerations of compassion.

To test my theory, I used several different methods. First, to better understand how politicians talk about issues in ways to highlight or diminish considerations of compassion, I analyzed a sample of 212 congressional speeches in several issue areas that have implications for groups in need: food stamps, immigration, health care, abortion, and the death penalty. I also analyzed presidential speeches about the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. In concert with these speeches, I analyzed presidential nomination acceptance speeches from 1996 to 2012. For all these, I assessed the amount of compassionate language political elites used and on behalf of what groups, breaking the appeals down by political party.

These speeches provided evidence pointing to different usage of compassionate language by party elites. In the speeches I analyzed, Democratic Party leaders used compassionate rhetoric more often, which is consistent with their philosophy toward government and the groups that support them. They also used compassionate language to support programs for groups that some might perceive as having contributed to their plights, such as death row inmates or undocumented immigrants. Republican elites primarily highlighted other considerations instead of compassion, such as law and order or individual rights. They also portrayed some of these groups as unworthy of

compassion, including the poor and death row inmates. On the issue of abortion, in contrast, Republican elites appealed to compassion for the unborn while Democrats largely did not, instead framing the issue as central to women's individual rights.

To understand how mass partisans connect compassion to their policy preferences, I analyzed four waves of the General Social Survey. This survey contained two items that I combined to measure a propensity to experience compassion. Using this measure, I analyzed the effects of compassion on political views about issues similar to those I examined in my analysis of leaders' speeches. I found that compassion is important to understanding policy preferences that affect those in need. However, the effect of compassion is asymmetrical in politics. For individuals who identify with the Democratic Party, propensities toward compassion are an important ingredient to explaining a host of issue preferences including those about welfare, capital punishment, immigration policy, and health care. For individuals who identify with the Republican Party, their views on these issues, for the most part, are not affected by their propensities toward compassion. The reverse is true for abortion. Here, more compassionate individuals who identify with the Republican Party are significantly more likely to favor public policy that limits abortion rights. More compassionate Democrats, however, are just as inclined to support abortion rights as are less compassionate Democrats.

Among the most important findings in my dissertation is that Republicans and Democrats do not differ in their propensities to experience compassion. Using survey evidence from 2002 to 2014, I find that identifying with one of the two parties is not correlated with one's compassion. The reason that partisans differ so much in their

preferences for issues for which compassion might be important appears to be how political elites talk about politics. My content analysis and my experimental evidence suggests that political elites make compassion more or less accessible to their partisans leading to the divergent effects of compassion on mass partisans' issue preferences.

When issues are not central to partisan contestation, my survey analysis suggests that people's propensity to experience compassion structures mass partisans' preferences similarly. For example, more compassionate Republicans and Democrats are more likely to donate to charities or to volunteer. When issues become partisan, it appears two different considerations are important to making compassion a significant ingredient in policy preferences. First mass partisans are more prone to connect compassion to issue preferences when their party elites have framed the issue to be about compassion. Second elites portray those in need as more or less deserving of compassion. One of the primary ways they do this is by depicting them as more or less in control of their circumstances. Perceptions of controllability may also influence whether or not people connect compassion to their preferences. I began to test this hypothesis in my second experiment, and I find some evidence suggesting that perceptions of controllability are also influential in explaining political divisions.

Although my survey analysis of policy preferences was suggestive of the causal mechanisms, survey experiments provided more direct tests. I conducted two experiments. The first examined the effect of the presence or absence of compassionate rhetoric on disability policy preferences, varying the party of the source of the message. The results showed that individuals connected compassion to their views about disability policy, regardless of whether or not they received specifically compassionate

language in the treatment. For Republicans, however, the compassionate language connected to a Republican cue boosted the already substantial influence of compassion on their preferences. In fact, it seems to explain the movement I found in Republicans' preferences in favor of greater government assistance to the disabled.

The second experiment tested the effect of compassionate appeals on a politically contentious issue: immigration policy. I designed the second experiment to test whether perceptions of controllability affect whether people connect their propensity to experience compassion in forming preferences. The notion was that people are more likely to feel compassion toward people or groups for whom their plights are beyond their control. People might feel anger toward people or groups in need when they believe they are in control of their situations. While the first experiment examined compassion for a group in need who was likely perceived by most as not in control of its plight (the disabled), the second experiment varied the controllability of the recipient.

In the second experiment, I found more direct evidence that compassionate appeals can increase the influence of compassion on political preferences. For Democrats, compassionate considerations were already an important factor in their preferences. This is consistent with my content analysis, which suggested that Democratic elites often talk about immigration in compassionate terms, making compassion accessible without the need for a cue in an experiment. For Republicans, however, compassion influenced their immigration policy preferences only after reading a compassion appeal. Appeals that included either a high controllability or low controllability cue made compassion influential on Republicans' immigration

preferences as compared to the control group, in which compassion not emphasized.

The second experiment also provided some evidence indicating that the low controllability condition was more effective at making compassion considerations relevant, but that evidence was not conclusive. Findings in the psychology literature indicate that controllability ought to facilitate compassion. Yet, in my experiment, it appeared that even a high controllability target of compassion was able to evoke compassion for undocumented immigrants and their families. In the future, I intend to examine the causal direction of perceptions of controllability and compassion specifically.

Implications

Compassion and Public Opinion

My research suggests that a propensity toward concern for others in need is an important variable in the study of the American electorate. On many issues affecting groups in need, compassion's influence was similar to, or greater than, other variables in my models of policy preferences, including ideology, race, gender, education, and income. Political surveys ought to include measures of compassion, particularly when asking people about issues involving others in need. Future research would examine the best items to capture this propensity. While I argue that the two items from the GSS I have used here are preferable to alternative measures, there may be an even clearer item(s) to tap this propensity through surveys. Beyond survey evidence, future research might include in-depth interviews to further understand how mass partisans think about compassion and its connection to politics.

Overcoming Polarization

The fact that compassion is universal suggests that elite messages of compassion can influence public opinion. My experimental treatments were actually more effective at moving Republican identifiers' policy preferences than those of Democrats'. In the first experiment, appeals to compassion by a Republican elite moved Republican identifiers about 4 percentage points more in favor of providing government assistance to the disabled. In the second experiment, a compassionate appeal led Republican identifiers to be about 4 percentage points more in favor of making the legal immigration process easier and about 6 percentage points more opposed to imposing more exclusionary immigration measures. For Democrats, the appeals were not particularly influential. I suspect this is because Democratic identifiers habitually associate such issues with compassion because of the rhetoric they commonly receive from their partisan elites. This likely makes a one-time appeal less influential on Democrats.

Moving Republicans on issues involving groups in need might be more consequential for political outcomes because these issues tend to be Democratic-owned issues. With such close divisions in today's politics, moving Republicans even a little bit in favor of such issues could make a big difference for political outcomes.

Is Compassion Beneficial?

My research uncovers evidence suggesting that political messages can influence what political issues people think about in terms of compassion and potentially even whom people have compassion for. Yet my research does not elucidate the potential benefits or drawbacks of such compassion. Compassion's utility has been debated for

centuries. Many from Aristotle to Rousseau to Hume, argue that compassion has largely positive consequences, arguing that compassion was “our best hope” for good relations between human beings (Nussbaum 2003, 12; see also Haidt 2003). In contrast, others, such as Kant, argued that “A feeling of sympathy is beautiful and amiable...But this good-natured passion is nevertheless weak and always blind” (1764). Plato and the Greek and Roman stoics posited that society should prioritize impartiality based on the principles of respect and dignity (Nussbaum 2003).

Compassion’s critics of late argue that compassion is inherently inequitable since it is aimed at addressing needs rather than providing the same help to all (Bloom 2013). They note that such policies can be paternalistic, creating dependency. This points up the importance of the distinction between pity and compassion. If it is indeed a requirement that a recipient of compassion must not be in control of his or her circumstances, compassion might be closer to pity than some of compassion’s proponents would argue. As explained, pity requires looking down on someone, while compassion by definition does not.

According to advocates for greater compassion, compassion is, “rational, principled, and respectful of autonomy. When we feel compassion, it is for good reasons; our emotional response to someone else’s suffering can prompt us to sort through these reasons, to discover the conditions that cause that suffering, and to improve our judgment” (in Shepherd 2003, 445). As Nussbaum (2013) argues, compassion is integral to a functioning society in that it increases awareness of the shared nature of human vulnerability (Nussbaum 2013). In this spirit, Franklin Roosevelt argued, “Better the occasional faults of a Government that lives in a spirit of

charity than the consistent omissions of a Government frozen in the ice of its own indifference.”

While I cannot do justice here to all of the normative considerations of compassion’s role in politics, I propose that the way leaders draw attention to concern for others is intrinsically important. Elites can choose to appeal to many different aspects of human nature. According to Sears (1993, 145-146), if elites, “evoke the uglier set of our predispositions—prejudice, ethnocentrism, nationalism, hostility toward the weak and disadvantaged—that is what we are likely to get. If they...appeal to our better sides—to our communitarian spirits, our selflessness, our idealism—that is what we are likely to get...”

2016 Election

As I was writing my dissertation, Donald Trump became the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. Unlike recent American presidential candidates from both parties, Trump generally does not appeal to compassion. Recent quotes highlight the general tone of Trump’s rhetoric: “I would bring back waterboarding and I’d bring back a hell of a lot worse than waterboarding.” “[John McCain’s] not a war hero. He is a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren’t captured.” “Look at that face! Would anyone vote for that?” “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending the best. ...They're bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime. They’re rapists and some, I assume, are good people.” Trump also famously mocked a reporter who has a congenital joint condition.

I find evidence suggesting Trump has alienated Republicans because of his uncompassionate rhetoric. My second experiment was included on a study that also

asked about presidential vote choice. The study took place just days after Ted Cruz and John Kasich had dropped out of the Republican race, and many in the party were left without an alternative to Trump. A large percentage of the Republicans in the study said they would rather vote for someone other than any of the candidates still in the race. Although the GSS studies I used in previous chapters showed Republicans did not differ in their compassion, the data from this experiment reveal nearly a 10 point difference between partisans. Importantly, the Republicans who reported not supporting Trump were similar to Democrats in their dispositions toward compassion. Trump’s supporters, however, were significantly lower in their dispositional compassion than any of the other candidate’s supporters. Below I list the average levels of compassion by each of the respective supporters of each candidate.

TABLE 28 2016 Presidential Candidate Choice and Compassion

Compassion, Means	
Trump	0.608
Other*	0.691
Clinton	0.689
Sanders	0.718

*72 percent of those who selected, “Other” were Republicans
 Source: TapResearch Online Survey of 1,800 respondents
 May 6, 2016

I also used the measure of compassion to predict support for Trump. I model support for Trump using a logit analysis, controlling for other relevant variables. I found that a propensity toward compassion was one of the largest predictors of whether or not someone supported Trump. More compassionate people were significantly less likely to support Trump.

TABLE 29 Compassion and Support for Trump

Support for Trump	
Compassion	-1.278 (-4.12)
Ideology	-2.930 (-11.16)
Authoritarianism	1.290 (5.84)
Female	-0.675 (-5.32)
Age	1.316 (4.41)
Income	0.887 (3.40)
Education	-0.967 (-3.89)
Black	-3.089 (-5.09)
Hispanic	-0.528 (-1.98)
Constant	0.695 (2.09)
<i>n</i>	1770

Source: TapResearch Online Survey of 1,800 respondents
May 6, 2016

That uncompassionate Republicans are so much more supportive of Trump than compassionate ones indicates Trump’s approach may be repelling some Republican identifiers. Certainly Democrats seem to think he is susceptible to attacks on this count. Recently, a Super PAC supporting Hillary Clinton began producing advertisements that seem designed specifically to draw attention to Trump’s lack of compassion. One of the ads features a child with a disability who references the fact that Trump mocked a

reporter with a disability. The other focused on the reporter himself. This election might highlight compassion as a dividing line to an even greater degree than years past.

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