

**Framing Faith:**

**How Voters Responded to Candidates' Religions in the 2008 Presidential Campaign**

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## Abstract

During the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, considerable attention was paid by pundits and voters alike to the personal characteristics of the candidates. In this paper we test how voters respond to information, framed in different ways, about a candidate's religious affiliation. We do so using a series of experiments embedded in multiple waves of the 2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project. The experiments were run in "real time," by which we mean that our subjects were introduced to timely information about the candidates throughout the primaries and general election season. In January, how did voters react to Mitt Romney's Mormonism? In March, how did they react to information about Barack Obama's controversial pastor, or to the recurring rumor that he is secretly a Muslim? We find that negatively perceived information about a candidate's religion has powerful effects that are not easily mitigated by countervailing positive information. While the framing literature suggests that prior knowledge and prior preferences can mitigate the effects of negatively perceived information, we find that general political knowledge has little to no effect as a buffer while specific religious knowledge can effectively buffer, though not completely erase, the effects of negative information. In addition to understanding the practical political effect of the candidates' religious affiliation, our analysis permits a greater theoretical understanding of how voters use religion as a heuristic when assessing candidates and thus, more broadly, the social identities that matter in contemporary American politics.

The 2008 presidential campaign was filled with references to candidate's religious affiliation, especially during each party's primary and caucus process in late 2007 and early 2008. Republican Mitt Romney faced seemingly endless questions about his Mormonism which he deflected but then finally attempted to address with a major campaign speech on December 6, 2007.<sup>1</sup> While Barack Obama did not face the constant questioning about his religion that was characteristic of the Romney campaign, a media firestorm erupted over the comments of his long time pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright of the Trinity United Church of Christ (TUCC). The ensuing storm came at a critical juncture during the extremely competitive nomination contest with Hillary Clinton and eventually led to Obama giving up his TUCC membership and disavowing Reverend Wright.

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<sup>1</sup> For the full text of the speech, see <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16969460>.

Our paper utilizes the literature on negative information and frames together with survey experiment data collected in the midst of the tumultuous 2008 nomination campaign to address questions related to the effect of information on candidate choice. In particular we are interested in the effect of information about the religious backgrounds of two major candidates that was largely perceived to be negative. The data come from the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP) a multi panel survey with waves fielded in the midst of the candidate campaigns of most interest to our topic. We find that negatively perceived information about a candidate's religion has powerful effects that are not easily mitigated by countervailing positive information. While the framing literature suggests that prior knowledge and prior preferences can mitigate the effects of negatively perceived information, we find that general political knowledge has little to no effect as a buffer while specific religious knowledge can effectively buffer, though not completely erase, the effects of negative information. There are particularly interesting nuances for religious knowledge in the case of Mitt Romney where we have numerous measures available. For example, personal acquaintance with a Mormon amplifies instead of buffering the negative reaction to Romney's Mormonism. Another striking difference occurs between those who self-report significant knowledge of Mormonism versus those who possess high levels of knowledge objectively measured with a brief knowledge battery. Hearing that Romney is a Mormon has a much larger negative impact on those who have high self-assessed knowledge of Mormonism than those who have high objective knowledge of Mormonism. Prior preferences, both political and religious, show mixed results. They can buffer but sometimes they serve to intensify a voter's reaction.

Messages about the candidates' religious affiliations, though not a prominent part of campaign advertising, were certainly a significant part of the campaign discourse in 2008. Our

results show that the information likely had powerful effects on the perceptions of the candidates.

### **Framing Effects, Negative Ads, and Candidate Choice**

Framing effects have a long history in psychology, political psychology, and public opinion, with clear framing effects demonstrated in substantive areas such as media, race, and campaigns. In an election campaign a frame is conceptualized as a central organizing principle for voters' comprehension of the political world. Kinder (1998, 796) refers to a frame as an "opinion recipe" or a recommendation about how a topic should be understood, while Gamson and Modigliani (1987, 143) define a frame as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them." Thus frames are a cognitive structure within individual's minds that help them sort through information presented by political elites, or "rhetorical weapons created and sharpened by political elites to advance their interests and ideas" (Kinder 1998, 822). This cognitive structure is seen as the product of social interaction between the public and the information-providing elites (Gamson 1992).

Frames are usually thought of as elite discourse that helps shape public opinion and in much of the literature frames typically tap into questions of fundamental values such as free speech, public order, equality, and so forth. But the definition of frames can easily be broadened to include a variety of information. In this sense, framing fits nicely with the literature in political science on experiments (Kinder and Palfrey 1993), more narrowly within theories of survey response (Zaller and Feldman 1992), and even with models of information processing and candidate evaluations (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989). Rather than frames designed to tap

into fundamental or competing values, we are interested in whether voters are persuaded by the way information about a candidate is framed. And under what conditions are they persuaded by the framed information? Our innovation is that we are dealing with realistic frames about real candidates in the midst of a heated presidential nomination campaign. While the substance of this information—candidates’ religion—is of interest in its own right, it provides an excellent opportunity to assess framing effects on candidate choice.

One powerful framing effect with considerable empirical and theoretical foundations demonstrates the power of negative information. These effects are sometimes referenced as “loss aversion” or “prospect theory” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). Quattrone and Tversky find that potential losses, when compared to the status quo, “loom larger than gains” (1988, 724). “Loss aversion” means that people express a “preference for the status quo over alternatives with the same expected value” and is used in this context as an explanation of incumbency advantage in elections (Ibid.). The powerful framing effects of negative information are part of a much larger literature in psychology demonstrating a disproportionately powerful effect of negative information. This is aptly summarized by one review essay using the summary statement “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister et al. 2001). The disproportionate effects of negative over positive are present in the impression or attitude formation literature, but also extend to evaluation and recall of events and even sensory experiences such as taste and smell.

Lau (1982; 1985) notes the asymmetry between positive and negative political information. He reviews two competing explanations for negativity bias in political settings. The first is perceptual—we are surrounded by mostly positive information and when negative information is viewed against this background, it stands out, is remembered, and thus has a

disproportionate effect. A second reason is motivational—we are cost oriented (and thus risk adverse), so that similar to the loss aversion literature, we are strongly motivated to avoid the potential costs. As evidence of potential costs mount, we are increasingly motivated to avoid them.

The power of negative information has also been well studied in the context of political campaigns, especially advertising. Considerable controversy exists over whether or not negative campaigns decrease turnout (e.g. Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995) or increase turnout (e.g. Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman 2002). The meta-analytic jury on this finds no turnout effect (Lau et al. 1999; Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007), but setting the controversy over turnout or mobilization effects of negative campaigns aside, there is more agreement that the information effects of negative ads are high. Negative information sticks with voters because it more effectively arouses our emotions (Brader 2006). Geer (2006) points out that negative information is also much more likely to be supported with specific facts and documentation, thus it may get more easily noticed and break through campaign clutter. A variety of work suggests that voters learn more from negative ads than positive ads, remember them longer, and perhaps become more engaged politically as a result (Geer 2006; Franz et al. 2008. Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner 2007; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Goldstein and Freedman 2002).

Both Geer (2006) and Franz et al (2008) note relevant characteristics of negative ad content. Ads focused on personal traits are not nearly as common as issue-based negative ads. Mendelberg (2001) further demonstrates some points about race in campaigns that have implications for the religious messages we are interested in. She shows the problematic nature of explicit campaign attacks involving race. More explicit attacks are less effective because a

message framed in explicitly racist terms also triggers a prevailing norm of equality that blunts the force of an explicitly racist appeal. She finds that negative messages that do not make explicit reference to race but trigger the respondent to think about the issue in terms of race have powerful effects. Although little is known about such effects outside of paid campaign advertising, it is plausible that similar pattern may occur in other contexts, such as media or internet discussions of a candidate's religion.

Gamson (1992) provides a helpful approach for understanding how framing effects can work outside of the oft-studied advertising effects. His research devises a mechanism for how frames in media or other messages become "culturally available." This definition is useful in showing that messages about political candidates do not have to be the subject of formal advertising or other campaign sponsored communications or even reported in the media to become culturally available. Negative messages about candidate religion are very likely to fit this category. Directly attacking another candidate's religion is likely in most cases to be seen as taboo and doing so may provoke unfavorable press coverage and even a backlash of sorts. But spreading negative information about another candidate's religion through viral email or other such methods, regardless of whether it is even true, is likely to enter the public discourse and become "culturally available" and thus potentially affecting voter evaluations of candidates. Some of the negative messages we present below were widely reported in the press, while others were not, but even those not widely reported were circulating and potentially affected candidate evaluations by some voters. Specifically, this paper will focus on voters' reactions to information about two presidential candidates in particular: Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. In Romney's case, we test voters' reactions to information about this membership in the Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints (aka the “Mormon” Church).<sup>2</sup> In the case of Obama, we examine how voters reacted to information about his membership in the Trinity United Church of Christ, as well as the rumor that he is a Muslim.

The general hypothesis which undergirds our analysis is simply that information perceived to be negative will drive down support for a candidate—*even in the face of countervailing information perceived to be positive*. However, we also hypothesize that voters’ predispositions can serve as buffers to negative information, negating or at least minimizing its impact. Conversely, there are other predispositions which can accentuate the impact of negative information. Specifically, we focus on two characteristics which the literature on framing suggests are critical moderators of how voters respond to information: both their prior knowledge and preferences (Chong and Druckman 2007).

Previous research on framing has found that, depending on other factors, higher levels of political knowledge can either accentuate (Nelson, Oxey, and Clawson 1997) or weaken framing effects (Kinder and Sanders 1990; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2001). In the case of candidate religion, it seems likely that respondents with greater relevant knowledge will be less affected by the information provided in our experiments about a presidential candidate because well-informed respondents are more likely to have formed a prior opinion on the subject. Hence, prior knowledge serves as a buffer to the information content of the frame.

There are many types of knowledge, however, and it is not clear that they all work the same way. While the existing literature has focused on political knowledge, the assessment of a candidate’s personal characteristics—especially his or her religion—is likely to also be moderated by at least three other types of knowledge. One is personal experience with the

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<sup>2</sup> Rather than use the church’s formal name throughout the paper, we will instead use the term “Mormon” to refer to Romney’s religion.

religion in question. In the case of Romney, does the respondent personally know a Mormon? A second is self-assessed knowledge. Do respondents think that they know a lot about, again in Romney's case, Mormonism? Still a third type of knowledge is objective. Do respondents actually have an accurate knowledge of what Mormons believe? This leaves us with four types of knowledge which could plausibly serve to moderate the impact of negative information: political, personal, self-assessed, and objective. In the Romney experiment we are able to examine the moderating impact of all four types of knowledge, but in the Obama experiment, we will be limited to testing the impact of political knowledge.

Prior preferences can also moderate the impact of information provided in the course of a campaign. For example, we would expect partisanship to serve as a perceptual screen such that, for example, Democrats are more inured to negative information about a Democratic candidate, and Republicans more so for information about a fellow Republican. However, since Romney and Obama were running in their parties' primaries at the time of our experiments—and thus were engaged in intra-party competition—it is not clear the extent to which partisanship per se will serve as a filter. We also expect that voters who are initially favorable toward a candidate are less influenced by negative information about that candidate although the degree to which such favorability buffers negative information remains an open question. In addition to political predispositions, there is a second type of prior preference with potential relevance for information about a candidate's religion, namely a voters' own religion. We would expect that religious views will mediate reactions to information about the religion of a political candidate. In sum, we expect a respondent's knowledge and prior preferences to mediate, and perhaps even negate, the impact of information about a candidate's religious background.

## Data

Our analysis uses data collected in the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP), a multi-investigator panel study conducted over the course of the 2008 presidential campaign season. The first wave of the study was conducted in December of 2007, with subsequent waves in January, March, September, October, and a post-election wave in November 2008. Surveys were administered on-line by YouGov/Polimetrix to a representative sample of registered voters<sup>3</sup> (Jackman and Vavreck 2009). The experiments analyzed herein ran in either January (Romney) or March (Obama). For the two experiments the “cell” sizes for each treatment averages roughly 200 cases. These cell sizes ensure a high degree of statistical power and the ability to look at subgroups of respondents.

The experiments were straightforward. Respondents were provided with a brief description of the candidate in question and then asked whether the information provided makes them more or less likely to vote for that candidate. For example, here is the baseline description of Mitt Romney, which includes no information about his religion but instead only positive, boilerplate biographical information:

*As you know, Mitt Romney is running for president. He is a successful businessman, a former governor of Massachusetts, and the head of the 2002 Winter Olympics. He has been married for thirty-nine years and raised five sons.*

*All else being equal, does the above information make you more or less likely to vote for Mitt Romney?*

*Much more likely*  
*Somewhat more likely*  
*Somewhat less likely*  
*Much less likely*

The baseline description of Barack Obama was similarly anodyne and positive:

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<sup>3</sup> The sample oversamples battleground states, such that voters in non-battleground and battleground states are represented in equal proportions.

*As you know, Barack Obama is running for president. He is a former community organizer in Chicago and a best-selling author. He is currently a U.S. Senator, representing the state of Illinois. He has been married for sixteen years and has two daughters.*

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of multiple descriptions of the candidate (10 for Romney, 6 for Obama). The baseline condition only includes the above biographical information, while the remaining treatments add additional information pertaining to the candidate's religion.

The Romney frames are listed in Table 1. Remember that in each case, the information about his religion followed the biographical boilerplate. There are four general categories for the descriptions of Romney, each of which touches on different aspects of Romney's Mormonism.

1. *Church/Mormon*: basic descriptions of Romney's involvement in either his church (unnamed) or in the LDS (Mormon) Church.
2. *Strange Beliefs*: descriptions of Mormons as holding strange beliefs, each of which is accompanied by one of two counterframes: (a) Mormons have the same values as members of other faiths; (b) a person's faith should be irrelevant to politics.
3. *Not Christian*: a description of Mormons as not really being Christians, with two subsequent descriptions containing counterframes to that claim: (a) a person's faith should be irrelevant to politics; (b) Mormons believe in Jesus Christ and have the same values as other faiths
4. *Racists*: a description of Mormons as racists, since blacks were denied full participation in the church's rites until 1978. One subsequent description provides countervailing information, specifically that Mitt Romney's father, George Romney, supported civil rights for African Americans in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Obama frames are detailed in Table 2. They can be divided into two categories, one which deals with the controversy surrounding Obama's church and pastor<sup>4</sup> and another which tests the impact of the recurring rumor that Obama is secretly a Muslim.

1. *Church Hostile to Whites*: a description of Obama's church as "hostile to Whites" and a promoter of "Black separatism," with two subsequent counterframes: (a) his church welcomes worshippers of all races; (b) his church teaches strong values
2. *Muslim*: a description of Obama as a Muslim, with one counterframe noting that he is "a committed Christian who attends the United Church of Christ."

All of the candidate descriptions met two criteria. First, all of the information was true, which undoubtedly weakened the effectiveness of our frames, since much of the information that voters are exposed to during the course of a campaign is false and thus more incendiary. For example, note that Obama was not described as a Muslim (which would be false); instead, the vignette referred to the fact that some people *claim* he is a Muslim (a statement that is true). Similarly, we did not describe Mormons as Christians or not—a matter which rests on theology—but simply reported that some people *say* Mormons are not Christians, an objectively true statement.

The second criterion met by all our descriptions is realism. All of the counterframes were actual arguments used during the 2008 campaign by supporters and opponents of Romney and Obama. We could have cited many different counterarguments to the allegation that Mormons are racists. The one we used was cited by Romney himself in the prominent speech he gave addressing his religion in December of 2007, specifically, that his own father (George Romney)

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<sup>4</sup> Note that we wrote these questions many weeks before the controversy regarding Jeremiah Wright became a major issue in the campaign. This was fortuitous, as it meant that our experiment was fielded when this information was circulating. It did, however, mean that our description of Obama's church is relatively mild compared to how Jeremiah Wright was portrayed in the press. We can only assume that a more vitriolic description would have triggered an even greater response. Nonetheless, our effects are quite large.

had been a supporter of civil rights.<sup>5</sup> While we do not claim that we included every argument and counter-argument regarding these candidates' religions, we were able to test most of the major claims heard throughout the 2008 campaign. It would be difficult to argue that these claims were not "culturally available," at least to significant proportions of the primary voters and caucus attendees.

## **Reactions to Romney**

We begin with our experiment testing reactions to Romney's Mormonism. Figure 1 displays how voters in general responded to the information provided in each of the descriptions. We have collapsed the four response categories into two: either the information made one more or less likely to vote for Romney. In interpreting these results, it is important to remember that respondents were required to indicate whether the information we provided made them more or less likely to support Romney; they could not indicate that the information had no effect. Thus, when we see that 20 percent of respondents indicated that the baseline description made them less likely to vote for Romney, we should not forget that this means 80 percent said it made them *more* likely.

The most relevant results to consider, therefore, are the comparisons between each treatment and the baseline, and so that is where we will focus our attention. For example, while 20 percent of voters said that the baseline description made them less likely to vote for Romney, 31 percent of voters said that learning Romney has been a local leader in his church (without naming it) makes them less likely to vote for him—an 11-point gap. However, 52 percent of

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<sup>5</sup> The relevant line from the speech was, "I was taught in my home to honor God and love my neighbor. I saw my father march with Martin Luther King." (The latter claim was later disputed by critics).

voters said that learning Romney has been a local leader in the *Mormon* church makes them less likely to vote for him—a 31-point gap.

While both these gaps are statistically significant,<sup>6</sup> the second is nearly three times as large. Table 3 displays the differences in the likelihood of voting for Romney between the baseline condition and each treatment. A bolded number means that the difference between that treatment and the baseline is statistically significant. An asterisk indicates that a treatment with a counterframe is statistically different than the frame which is being countered, e.g. whether the frame that “Mormons are not Christian, but faith should be irrelevant to politics” is significantly different than just the information that Mormons are said by some not to be Christians. Since the two references to Mormons having strange beliefs are both accompanied by counterframes, asterisks do not apply to them. Likewise, asterisks do not apply to the Church/Mormon frames, since they have no counterframes.

Note that we find support for the hypothesis that negative information drives out the positive. As noted, hearing that Romney is a leader in his church is modestly negative information, while adding the information that he is a Mormon substantially elicits an even more negative response. Given that 43 percent of voters gave Mormons an unfavorable rating in the January wave of the CCAP panel, it is perhaps not surprising that the description of Romney as a Mormon would be a negative cue.

The two descriptions which mention that Mormons have “strange beliefs” are nearly identical to simply hearing that Romney is a Mormon. Voters’ negativity toward Mormons is apparently not swayed by the counterframes that Mormons share the same values as other faiths, nor by the argument that faith should be irrelevant to politics. Similarly, hearing either that some

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<sup>6</sup> All tests of statistical significance reported in this paper are two-tailed.

people believe Mormons are not Christians or that they are racists has a similarly sized negative impact on support for Romney.

What about the counterframes to the “not Christian” and “racist” frames? In both cases, the counterframes do reduce the negative reaction to Romney, but not enough to wipe out the impact of the negative information. Take, for example, the counterframe to the “not Christian” claim which points out that Mormons believe in Jesus Christ and have the same values as members of other faiths (a major theme in Romney’s December 2007 speech on his religion).<sup>7</sup> While simply hearing the “not Christian” charge drives down support for Romney by 33 percentage points, hearing that charge accompanied by this counterframe only drives down support by 19 percentage points—a statistically significant 14-point difference. Similarly sized effects are observed for the other counterframes.

We turn to testing whether and, if so how, knowledge moderates the reaction to these frames, beginning with political knowledge. Political knowledge is measured using a 14-item index of factual items about contemporary politics.<sup>8</sup> Respondents were divided into roughly three equal categories of their level of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Results for the series of Romney frames are presented for respondents with low, medium, and high levels of knowledge.

With only a few exceptions, political knowledge has little impact on how voters respond to the various Romney frames. One exception is that while people with little political knowledge have a negative reaction to the information that Romney is a local leader in his church, neither the medium or high knowledge groups had any reaction (that is, their reaction was not

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<sup>7</sup> From Romney’s speech on his religion: “There is one fundamental question about which I often am asked. What do I believe about Jesus Christ? I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind.”

<sup>8</sup> Ten of the items consisted of identifying whether particular people serve in the House, Senate, or neither (John Dingell, Nancy Pelosi, Bill Gates, John Boehner, Susan Collins, Henry Waxman, Jon Kyl, Dennis Kucinich, Patrick Leahy, and Ted Kennedy). The other items were identifying the position held by Condoleezza Rice, identifying the Guantanamo Bay is a US detention facility, whether the US dollar had become stronger or weaker over the last year, and whether over the last few years the US has increased or decreased imports of manufactured goods.

<sup>9</sup> The three categories reflect the bottom, middle, and top third of correct responses.

statistically different than the baseline). The only other notable exception is that people with a medium level of political knowledge are apparently reassured about the possibility that Mormons might not be Christians when they hear the argument that faith should be irrelevant to politics—the latter group supports Romney to the same degree as those who received only the baseline description.

In examining the three other types of knowledge which we hypothesized might serve as a buffer for the information about Romney's religion--personal, self-assessed, and objective--we find that these types of knowledge do indeed correspond with different reactions to the information about Romney's religion (see Table 4). Personally knowing a Mormon<sup>10</sup> leads to a stronger negative reaction to both the generic description of Romney as a local leader in his church and the information that he is a Mormon. Thus, instead of buffering the negative reaction to Romney's Mormonism, personal acquaintance with a Mormon amplifies it. For example, of those who know a Mormon, hearing that Romney is a Mormon drives down his support by a sizable 42 percentage points (versus the baseline); for those who do not know a Mormon, their support only falls by 20 percentage points.

On the other hand, personally knowing a Mormon does weaken the impact of being told that some people think Mormons are not Christians—a drop in support of 23 points versus 48 points for those who do not know a Mormon. As might be expected, the counterframes to the “not Christian” frame have a bigger impact on those who do not know a Mormon. They do not neutralize the negative reaction to being told that Mormons are not Christian, but they do appear to lessen the impact.

The results are more equivocal for the frame that Mormons are racists. Both those who do and do not know a Mormon have a similar response (30 and 35 percentage points, respectively).

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<sup>10</sup> 58 percent of the sample said they personally knew a Mormon.

The counterframe, that Mitt Romney’s father was outspoken on civil rights, diminishes the impact modestly for those who know a Mormon (12 points, with a two-tailed significance level of 0.11), but does not approach statistical significance for voters unacquainted with a Mormon (8 points,  $p=.36$ ).

In sum, knowing a Mormon elicits a more negative reaction to Romney’s Mormonism than not knowing a Mormon. However, those who know a Mormon are less affected by the charge that Mormons are not Christians, and are slightly more likely to be reassured that Mormons are not racists.

We see an interesting difference between self-assessed and objective knowledge of Mormonism. Self-assessed knowledge is based on a question that simply asks how much the respondent knows about “the Mormon religion and its practices.”<sup>11</sup> Objective knowledge is based on a four-item battery of factual questions about Mormon beliefs and practices.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most significant comparison is between those who say they know a lot about Mormonism versus those who objectively do know a lot—the contrast between the two groups is striking. Hearing that Romney is a Mormon has a much larger impact on those who have high self-assessed knowledge of Mormonism (37 points) than those who have high objective knowledge of Mormonism (16 points). Comparable differences are seen for the “Strange Beliefs” and “Not Christian” frames. And while both groups have the same reaction to the information that Mormons are allegedly racists, those with high objective knowledge are much more likely to be

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<sup>11</sup> Those who answer some/a great deal (64 percent) are coded as having high self-assessed knowledge of Mormonism, while those who answer not very much/nothing at all (36 percent) are coded as having low self-assessed knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> The items are whether Mormons practice polygamy today (false); do not drink alcohol (true); pay 10 percent of their income to their church (true); and do not believe in the Bible (false). The mean score on the index is 3.28. Accordingly those with a perfect 4 are coded as having “high objective knowledge” while those who scored less than 4 are coded as having low knowledge. This splits the sample in half (49 percent have a perfect score). Note that, in the January wave, this index was only asked of 2/3 of the respondents (i.e. the items were only included on 2 of the 3 universities’ modules involved in this study).

reassured that they are not upon reading the counterframe. Indeed, they are so reassured that they do not differ from those who receive the baseline description.

In comparing those who have low self-assessed knowledge of Mormons versus those who have low objective knowledge, we also find a notable difference. Those with low objective knowledge react more negatively to the information provided about Romney's religion.

By way of summary, objective knowledge—about Mormonism, not politics—serves as a buffer for negative information about Romney's religion. Personal knowledge leads to a stronger negative reaction to contentless cues about his Mormonism, but nonetheless serves to buffer some of the specific charges leveled against Mormons.

We move next to prior preferences as another potential buffer to negative information, beginning with what might be expected to be the strongest buffer of all, favorability toward Romney as measured in the baseline survey (see Table 5). We divide the sample into three categories of roughly equal size: those who are favorable toward Romney (N=819), neutral or have no opinion (N=735), or unfavorable (N=756). There are notable differences in how these groups react to the information we provided about Romney. Those who were predisposed to favor Romney are largely unaffected by most of the negative information in the various descriptions, or are persuaded once the countervailing information is provided. For instance, learning that Romney is a Mormon drives down the respondent's support (21 points). But the reactions to the frames which describe Mormon beliefs as strange coupled with counterframes are no different than the baseline.

Similarly, hearing the charge that Mormons are not Christian also drives support down for those who favor Romney, but that is counterbalanced by either counterframe. In fact, respondents who were told Mormons may not be Christians accompanied by the statement that

faith should be irrelevant are *more* likely to support Romney than those who heard the baseline description. As for the claim that Mormons are racists—obviously, a highly charged accusation—those favorable toward Romney are unshaken by it. Hearing the counterframe (that Romney’s father defended civil rights) also makes them more supportive than those who only heard the baseline. The story is very different for those who are either neutral or unfavorable toward Romney. For both groups, the negative information has a strong effect, stronger for those who are negative than those who are neutral.

Taken together, these findings suggest that negative information has little effect on those who were predisposed to favor Romney, a moderate effect on those who were neutral or had no opinion, but reinforces the pre-existing negativity among those who gave him an unfavorable rating--leading to the strongest negative effect of all.

We find similar results when we turn to a similar prior preference, namely partisanship (Table 6). Republicans are generally less affected by negative information than Democrats. Interestingly, Democrats are not swayed a bit by the counterframe to the charge that Mormons are racists, while for Republicans the counterframe completely counterbalances the allegation of racism.

Owing to the difficulties Romney had in gaining support among evangelical voters, it is also informative to compare the reactions of evangelicals (defined here as those who report being “born again”) to Catholics to respondents unaffiliated with religion. Interestingly, both evangelicals and the unaffiliated have similar reactions to the various frames. The key differences are that evangelicals are unaffected by the information that Romney is a local leader in his (unnamed) church, while that information drives down the support of non-affiliators. Conversely, upon being told that some people think Mormons are not Christians the unaffiliated

respondents are reassured by the information that Mormons share the same values as other faiths, while this counterframe has no effect on evangelicals. Given that many evangelical churches teach that Mormons are not Christians, this finding is likely another example of negative information reinforcing a prior belief.

Compared to evangelicals and the unaffiliated, Catholics have more complicated reactions. They are persuaded by the counterframe that, while Mormon beliefs might be strange, faith ought to be irrelevant to politics (a sentiment most famously expressed by a Catholic, John F. Kennedy). And, like the unaffiliated, they are also persuaded by the counterframe that, even if some say Mormons are not Christians, they share the same values as other faiths. Finally, Catholics are not influenced by the claim that Mormons are racist, although those who heard the racist counterframe are less supportive of Romney than those who heard the baseline description, but more supportive than those who were simply told that Romney is a Mormon. We interpret these results to mean that Catholics do not have strong prior preferences regarding Mormons, whereas evangelicals and the unaffiliated do. Indeed, this supposition is confirmed by the fact that Catholics are more likely to have a favorable opinion of Mormons than either evangelicals or the unaffiliated.<sup>13</sup>

From the individual trees of these individual results, a forest comes into view. Just as knowledge can serve as a buffer for negative information, so can prior preferences. The people most resilient to negative information are those who already favor Romney. On the other hand, those with a negative assessment of Romney or Republicans, or with a background which suggests a negative response to Mormons, are affected most strongly by the negative information.

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<sup>13</sup> Respondents were asked to rate their favorability toward Mormons. Sixty-five percent of Catholics have a favorable opinion (combining “mostly” and “very” favorable), compared to 54 percent of evangelicals and 44 percent of the unaffiliated.

## Reactions to Obama

We can test whether the power of negative frames and the moderating effects of knowledge and prior preferences are idiosyncratic to Romney by examining how voters respond to information about Barack Obama. Figure 2 mirrors Figure 1, displaying the percentage of respondents who said that the information contained in each vignette made them less likely to support Obama. As with the Romney frames, the most useful comparison is between the baseline—which, recall, contains only boilerplate biographical information—and each of the other experiments. The fact that even the innocuous baseline description leads 37 percent of respondents to say that it makes them less likely to support Obama reminds us that some voters react negatively to all sorts of information. Thus tables 7-9 present comparisons between each treatment and the baseline.

When all respondents are taken as a whole, we can see that the information about Obama's church was potentially incendiary. The field dates for the study fell in the midst of the controversy over Obama's church and pastor, which undoubtedly contributed to the strength of the effect.<sup>14</sup> The negative effect is larger for the information about Obama's church than the allegation that Obama is a Muslim, while neither of the counterframes for the information about Obama's church have any neutralizing effect. And while the Muslim frame has a negative effect, the counterframe that Obama is actually a committed Christian counteracts its impact. Given the events of the time, this is understandable, since news attention was focused on the fact that Obama attended the Trinity United Church of *Christ*. Hullabaloo about Obama's Christian church would seem to undercut the claim that he is secretly a Muslim.

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<sup>14</sup> The field dates for the March wave were March 21<sup>st</sup> – April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The story about Jeremiah Wright and the Trinity United Church of Christ broke in early March; Obama gave his much-discussed speech on race in America in response to the controversy on March 18, 2008.

As with the Romney frames, we find that political knowledge has a limited moderating effect. When respondents are divided into those with high, medium, and low knowledge, we find slight differences at most. The information about Obama's church is negative across the board, although the people with low political knowledge are the most susceptible to persuasion by the positive counterframes, while those with a medium level of knowledge are actually less supportive of Obama upon hearing the counterframes. People with low knowledge are not affected by the claim that Obama is a Muslim, while those with high knowledge are affected but then reassured by the counterframe. The general theme here is that the information about Obama's church was not buffered by more generalized political knowledge.

We do not have measures of other types of knowledge, as we did with Romney, but we find it notable that for both Romney and Obama political knowledge does little to buffer the negative information contained in the vignettes. That is, the impact of politically salient religious cues is not moderated by generalized political knowledge.

Perhaps surprisingly, negative information about Obama's religion was not buffered by what might be considered the strongest prior preference: favorability toward Obama.<sup>15</sup> (See Table 8). Regardless of the favorability toward Obama (measured at the beginning of the campaign), the allegation that Obama's church is hostile to whites and promotes black separatism triggers a negative response. With only one exception, this holds true for the counterframes as well—the lone exception being that people who have a neutral view toward Obama are persuaded by the information that his church teaches good values. The story is similar for the two Muslim frames. Whatever their level of favorability toward Obama, the news that some say he is a Muslim engenders a negative response. Across the board, however, that

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<sup>15</sup> In the baseline survey (December 2007), 38 percent of respondents had an unfavorable view of Obama, 21 percent had a neutral view (or had no opinion), and 41 percent had a favorable view.

negativity is counteracted by the counterframe to the Muslim accusation. (For those who are neutral toward Obama, this frame actually makes them more likely to support Obama than the baseline).

The absence of a moderating effect for favorability toward Obama on voters' responses to the negative information about his religion is a departure from the results for Romney, where we found that favorability buffered much of the negative information about Mormonism. Even Obama's supporters were concerned about the accusations swirling around his church and pastor. Unlike the concerns about Romney's Mormonism (or for that matter, the allegations that Obama was a Muslim), which were largely a whispering campaign, Obama's church and pastor was high profile, front-page news. The fact that Obama was still contending for the Democratic nomination against a serious challenge by Hillary Clinton no doubt also contributed to the heightened reaction, even among those who were inclined to support Obama.

When we turn to another prior preference, partisanship, we see an interesting contrast. As with favorability toward Obama, party identification does little to moderate the information about Obama's church—Republicans and Democrats alike say it makes them less likely to vote for him, with the counterframes having little or no effect. Republicans and Democrats, however, differ dramatically in their response to the allegation that Obama is a Muslim. Republicans have a very strong negative reaction to that news (one of the largest in either experiment), while Democrats have no reaction whatsoever. While Republicans are partially (and significantly) reassured by the counterframe, they still report a negative reaction. Democrats, on the other hand, are *more likely* to support Obama upon receiving the description of Obama as a Muslim accompanied by the counterframe. This pattern is similar to the voters who are favorable toward Romney responding positively when they hear the description of Mormons as racists

accompanied by the counterframe. In both cases, we suspect that these voters are rallying behind a candidate who they feel has been subject to unfair criticism. These are rare examples of positive information actually superseding the negative.

In comparing respondents of different religious identities, we see substantial differences. Interestingly, Catholics respond more negatively than evangelicals<sup>16</sup> to the information about Obama’s church.<sup>17</sup> Catholics also have a stronger reaction to the claim that Obama is a Muslim than evangelicals, but are also more likely to be reassured by the counterframe. Interestingly, the most distinctive religious group in this regard was the unaffiliated. These respondents were unaffected by the information about Obama’s church (no significance differences compared to the baseline), and responded *positively* to both descriptions of Obama as a Muslim (significantly higher than the baseline). In this case, the prior preference does not just lead to positive information outweighing the negative; it actually leads to ostensibly “negative” information—that Obama is a Muslim<sup>18</sup>—triggering a positive response.

### **Comparing the Romney and Obama Experiments**

We find both similarities and differences when comparing the Romney and Obama experiments. One key similarity is that political knowledge makes little difference for how voters respond to information about either candidate’s religion. One key difference, however, is that candidate favorability—which we assumed would be a strong moderating influence—mattered for reactions to Romney membership in the Mormon church, but not for Obama’s membership in

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<sup>16</sup> Recall that “evangelical” is operationalized as Protestants who report being born again.

<sup>17</sup> Since our operationalization of evangelical includes African Americans, one might wonder if the muted response to the accusations regarding Obama’s church is driven by the high favorability of blacks toward Obama. When we re-run the same analysis but exclude black respondents, the results are very similar.

<sup>18</sup> We wish to stress that there is no reason that being identified as a Muslim need be considered negative information. As shown in our data, however, empirically it turns out to be the case that most Americans do respond negatively to the description of Obama as a Muslim. A majority, 54 percent, of our respondents give Muslims an unfavorable rating.

Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ. The charges leveled against Obama's church triggered a negative reaction even among Obama's supporters, which was not overridden by the positive counterframes provided. The potency of Obama's church as a potentially damaging issue is no doubt the reason that Obama eventually left the church and disavowed his former pastor.

For both candidates, some prior preferences served as buffers to the negative frames—although the specific prior preference that matters varies. In the case of Obama, the strongest buffer to the negative information about his religion was a lack of religious affiliation. These respondents were not affected by news about Obama's church nor by the news that he is Muslim. Contrast that to Romney, where the unaffiliated expressed a highly negative reaction to information about his religion. Given that Romney is far more conservative than Obama, the differing reactions of the unaffiliated to information about these candidates' religions are almost certainly another example of negative information either being rebuffed or received because of prior preferences. Unaffiliated Americans are more likely to be liberal politically, while religious Americans are more likely to have conservative politics; accordingly, the unaffiliated were not persuaded by information about Obama's religion but were affected by news about Romney's religion. However, political ideology is not the whole story, as religious predispositions matter too. Evangelicals are generally conservative politically, and yet they also responded negatively to information about Romney's Mormonism.

Given the attention paid to the oft-repeated rumor that Obama is secretly a Muslim, it is also interesting to note that voters were generally reassured by the counterframe (that Obama is actually a committed Christian). But, again, we see that prior preferences shape voters' responses, as Republicans were more receptive to the Muslim claim than Democrats. Democrats,

in fact, were not affected at all by the news that Obama is a Muslim, while Republicans were strongly affected. While the counterframe partly neutralized the Muslim claim for Republicans, even with the countervailing information his support dropped by a sizeable 28 percentage points among Republican identifiers (compared to 50 for the Muslim claim sans counterframe).

## **Conclusion**

We have tested voters' responses to information regarding the religious backgrounds of two presidential candidates. In so doing, our objective has been to illuminate framing effects in the real-time of a presidential campaign, a subject that is under-explored in the literature. Our results make clear that information about the religion of a candidate can be potentially inflammatory. In Romney's case, the question obviously arises as to whether his campaign was doomed from the start because of his Mormonism. Our evidence indicates that negative perceptions of Mormons are widespread and, for many voters, resistant to countervailing information. While this does not mean that Romney was, or in the future will be, unable to win either the Republican nomination or a general election, it does suggest that his religion is a potential liability. On the other hand, our evidence regarding Obama suggests that negative information about religion need not doom a candidate to defeat. Information about Obama's membership in Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, and therefore his implied association with the controversial Reverend Jeremiah Wright, led to a sharply negative response from voters—even among people who were favorable toward Obama. Yet, as the campaign proceeded, it largely faded away as an issue and, obviously, Obama was able to win both the Democratic nomination and the general election notwithstanding any lingering concerns about the church he attended in Chicago. Similarly, the rumor that Obama is secretly a Muslim did not

have much traction, as in this case voters were convinced by the countervailing information. This study of one set of frames in one election cycle, however, obviously leaves much yet to be learned. Future research can profitably examine the framing of information about other aspects of other candidates in other elections.

More broadly, our research confirms the efficacy of negative frames. Negative information crowds out the positive (even if the “negative” information is simply identifying a candidate as a member of a religion or church which meets with disapprobation). Furthermore, political knowledge has little to no effect as buffer to negative information related to religion. However, religious knowledge can act as such a buffer, but in different ways depending on the type and source of the knowledge. Prior preferences, political and religious, can also act as buffers, but can also intensify a voter’s reaction. All in all, these findings suggest that frames can matter in campaigns as part of an ongoing conversation between political elites and the public.

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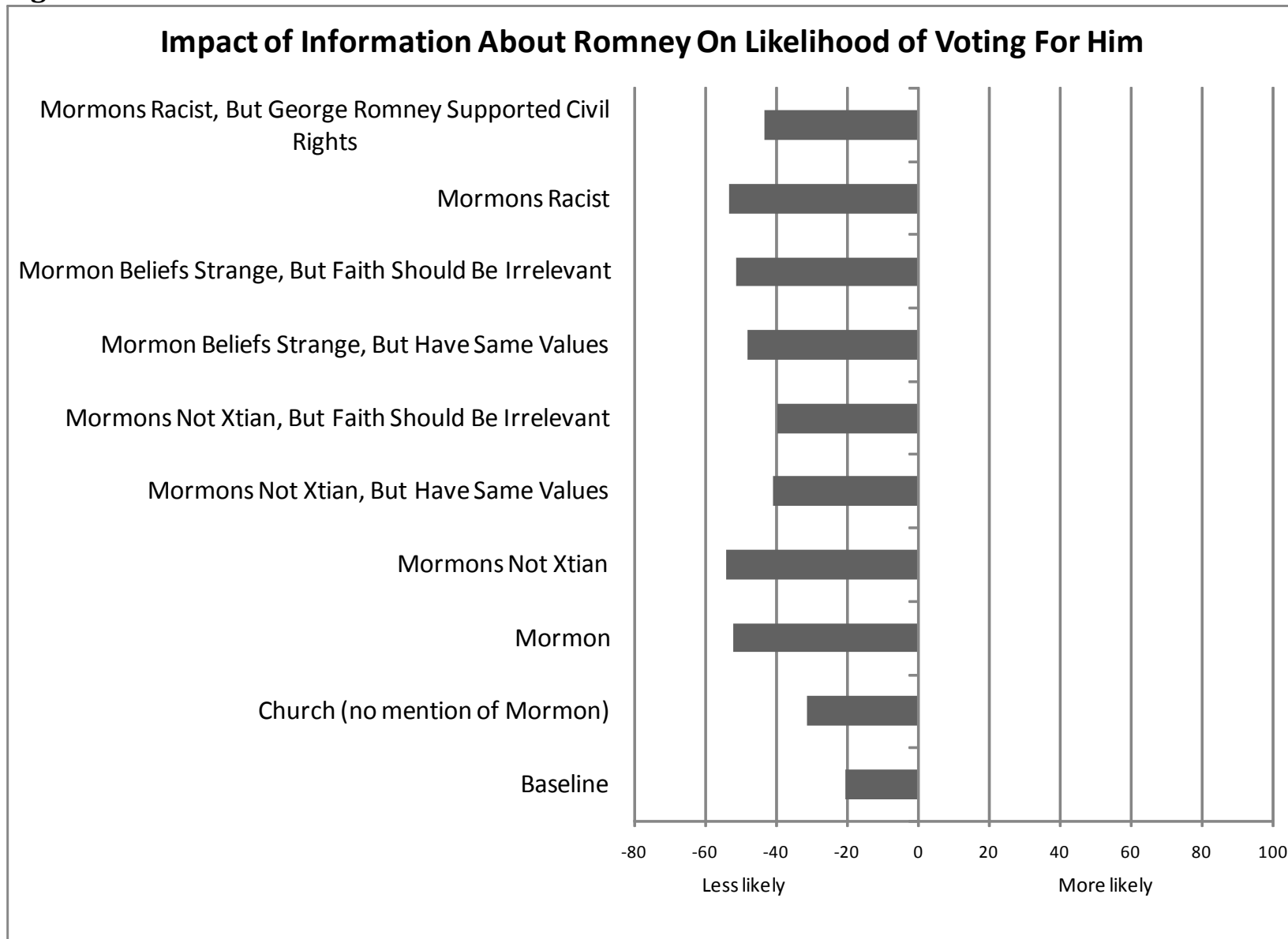
**Table 1. Descriptions of Mitt Romney**

Baseline	As you know, Mitt Romney is running for president. He is a successful businessman, a former governor of Massachusetts, and the head of the 2002 Winter Olympics. He has been married for thirty-nine years and raised five sons.
Church	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader in his church.
Mormon	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church.
Strange Beliefs, But Same Values	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have expressed concern that Mormons hold beliefs that seem strange. Other people say there is no reason for concern, because Mormons have the same values as members of other faiths.
Strange Beliefs, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have expressed concern that Mormons hold beliefs that seem strange. Others say that Mitt Romney's religion should not be an issue in the campaign, since a person's faith should be irrelevant to politics.
Not Christian	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have said that Mormons are not really Christians, because some of their beliefs are different from Protestants and Catholics.
Not Christian, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have said that Mormons are not really Christians, because some of their beliefs are different from Protestants and Catholics. Others say that Mitt Romney's religion should not be an issue in the campaign, since a person's faith should be irrelevant to politics.
Not Christian, But Believe in Jesus Christ	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have said that Mormons are not really Christians, because some of their beliefs are different from Protestants and Catholics. Others point out that Mormons believe in Jesus Christ, and that they have the same values as members of other faiths.
Racists	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have said that Mormons are racists because until 1978 the Mormon Church did not allow blacks to participate fully in church rites.
Racists, But George Romney Supported Civil Rights	Mitt Romney has also been a local leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often called the Mormon Church. Some people have said that Mormons are racists because until 1978 the Mormon Church did not allow blacks to participate fully in church rites. Others point out that some Mormons, including Mitt Romney's father, supported civil rights for blacks throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

**Table 2. Descriptions of Barack Obama**

Baseline	As you know, Barack Obama is running for president. He is a former community organizer in Chicago and a best-selling author. He is currently a U.S. Senator, representing the state of Illinois. He has been married for sixteen years and has two daughters.
Church Hostile to Whites	Barack Obama is a member of the Trinity United Church of Christ. Some people have said his church is hostile to Whites and promotes Black separatism.
Church Hostile, but welcomes people of all races	Barack Obama is a member of the Trinity United Church of Christ. Some people have said his church is hostile to Whites and promotes Black separatism. Others point out that his church welcomes worshippers of all races.
Church Hostile, but teaches good values	Barack Obama is a member of the Trinity United Church of Christ. Some people have said his church is hostile to Whites and promotes Black separatism. Others point out that his church emphasizes values for African Americans such as a strong work ethic, commitment to family, and self-respect.
Muslim	Some people have said that he must be a Muslim, because his paternal grandfather was a Muslim.
Muslim, But Is Christian	Some people have said that he must be a Muslim, because his paternal grandfather was a Muslim. Others point out that he is a committed Christian who attends the United Church of Christ.

**Figure 1**



**Table 3. Reactions to the Romney Frames, By Levels of Political Knowledge**

	All	Low political knowledge	Medium political knowledge	High political knowledge
Church (no mention of Mormon)	<b>-11</b>	<b>-23</b>	-0.07	-1
Mormon	<b>-31</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>-44</b>	<b>-20</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons have strange beliefs”</b>				
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Have Same Values	<b>-28</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-21</b>	<b>-22</b>
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-31</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-24</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are not Christian”</b>				
Mormons Not Christian	<b>-33</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-36</b>	<b>-26</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-20*</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>-6*</b>	<b>-18</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Have Same Values	<b>-19*</b>	<b>-16*</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-18</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are racist”</b>				
Mormons Racist	<b>-33</b>	<b>-37</b>	<b>-25</b>	<b>-35</b>
Mormons Racist, But George Romney Supported Civil Rights	<b>-23*</b>	<b>-23*</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>-22</b>
N	2310	934	655	673

- Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Romney, compared to the baseline description.
- Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.
- For the “Not Christian” frames, an asterisk means that the cell is significantly different than “Mormons Not Christian” (without a counter-frame). For the “Racist” frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the “Mormons Racist” frame.

**Table 4. Reactions to the Romney Frames, By Knowledge of Mormons/Mormonism**

	All	Know a Mormon	Do not know a Mormon	Know a lot about Mormons (self-described)	Do not know a lot about Mormons (self-described)	High Mormon knowledge (objective)	Low Mormon knowledge (objective)
Church (no mention of Mormon)	<b>-11</b>	<b>-15</b>	-6	<b>-9</b>	<b>-14</b>	-7	<b>-14</b>
Mormon	<b>-31</b>	<b>-42</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-37</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-16</b>	<b>-38</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons have strange beliefs”</b>							
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Have Same Values	<b>-28</b>	<b>-22</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>-34</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-9</b>	<b>-45</b>
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-31</b>	<b>-26</b>	<b>-27</b>	<b>-32</b>	<b>-29</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-35</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are not Christian”</b>							
Mormons Not Christian	<b>-33</b>	<b>-23</b>	<b>-48</b>	<b>-33</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-13</b>	<b>-44</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-20*</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>-30*</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-15*</b>	-7	<b>-36*</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Have Same Values	<b>-19*</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-19*</b>	<b>-21*</b>	<b>-19*</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-15*</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are racist”</b>							
Mormons Racist	<b>-33</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-29</b>	<b>-42</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-38</b>
Mormons Racist, But George Romney Supported Civil Rights	<b>-23*</b>	<b>-18</b>	<b>-27</b>	<b>-16*</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-2*</b>	<b>-39</b>
N	2310	919	614	1483	827	723	712

● Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Romney, compared to the baseline description.

● Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.

● For the “Not Christian” frames, an asterisk means that the cell is significantly different than “Mormons Not Christian” (without a counter-frame). For the “Racist” frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the “Mormons Racist” frame.

**Table 5. Reactions to the Romney Frames, By Prior Favorability Toward Romney**

	All	Very/Somewhat favorable toward Romney (baseline)	Neutral/Have not heard enough to say (baseline)	Very/Somewhat unfavorable toward Romney (baseline)
Church (no mention of Mormon)	<b>-11</b>	0.01	<b>-17</b>	-18
Mormon	<b>-31</b>	<b>.21</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-34</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons have strange beliefs”</b>				
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Have Same Values	<b>-28</b>	-1	<b>-30</b>	<b>-47</b>
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-31</b>	7	<b>-41</b>	<b>-55</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are not Christian”</b>				
Mormons Not Christian	<b>-33</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-38</b>	<b>-48</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-20*</b>	<b>10*</b>	<b>-36</b>	<b>-41</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Believe in Christ and Have Same Values	<b>-19*</b>	1*	<b>-13*</b>	<b>-51</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are racist”</b>				
Mormons Racist	<b>-33</b>	-1	<b>-38</b>	<b>-59</b>
Mormons Racist, But George Romney Supported Civil Rights	<b>-23*</b>	<b>9*</b>	<b>-27</b>	<b>-56</b>
N	2310	819	735	756

● Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Romney, compared to the baseline description.

● Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.

● For the “Not Christian” frames, an asterisk means that the cell is significantly different than “Mormons Not Christian” (without a counter-frame). For the “Racist” frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the “Mormons Racist” frame.

**Table 6. Reactions to the Romney Frames, by Partisanship and Religious Identity**

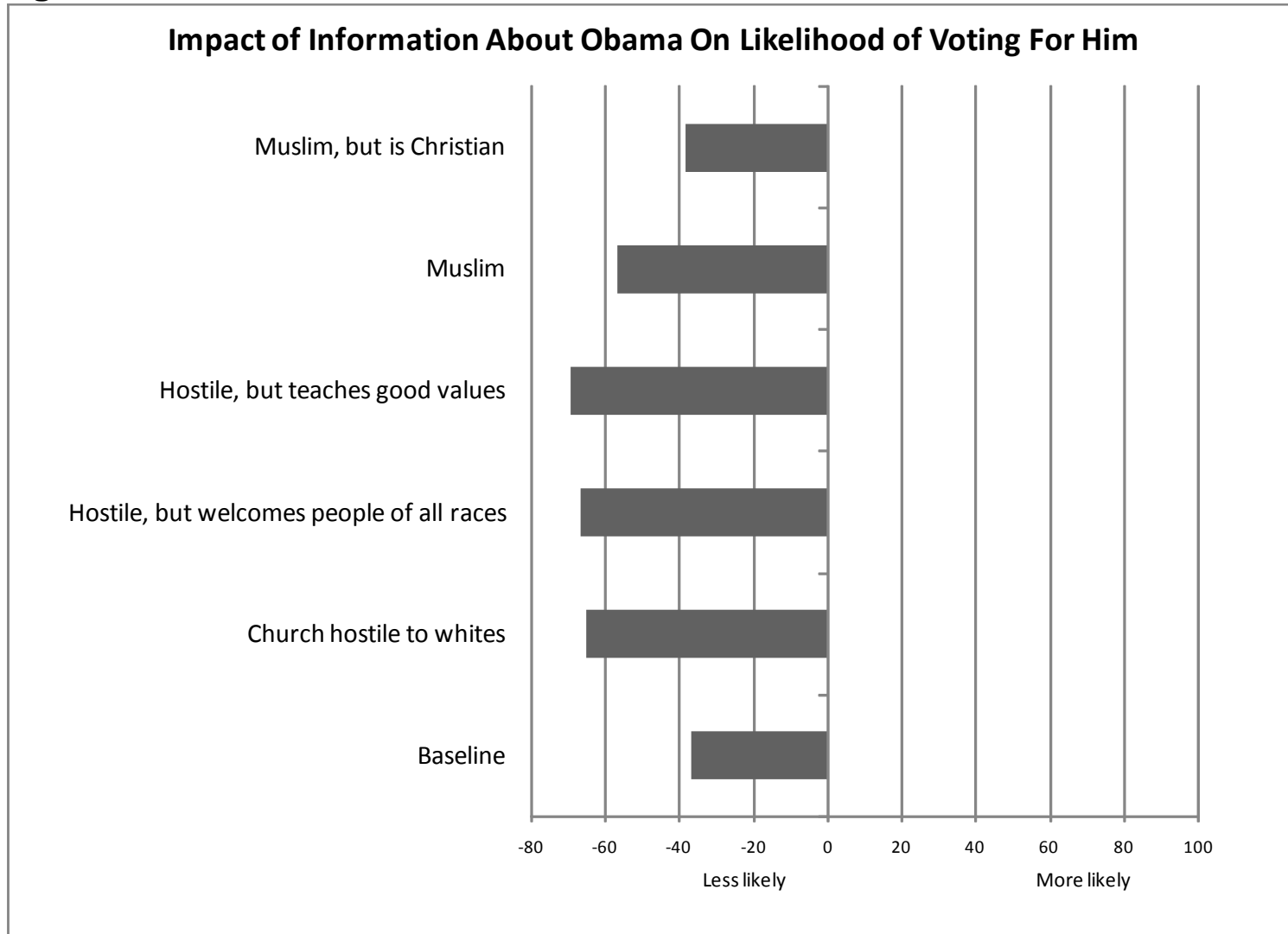
	<b>All</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democrat</b>	<b>Born again</b>	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>No religion</b>
Church (no mention of Mormon)	<b>-11</b>	0.00	<b>-25</b>	-4	<b>-17</b>	<b>-24</b>
Mormon	<b>-31</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-38</b>	<b>-29</b>	<b>-33</b>	<b>-41</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons have strange beliefs”</b>						
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Have Same Values	<b>-28</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>-37</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>-33</b>
Mormon Beliefs Strange, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-31</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>-57</b>	<b>-26</b>	-10	<b>-46</b>
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are not Christian”</b>						
Mormons Not Christian	<b>-33</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>-48</b>	<b>-31</b>	<b>-29</b>	<b>-38</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Faith Should Be Irrelevant	<b>-20*</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-28*</b>	<b>-27</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-31</b>
Mormons Not Christian, But Have Same Values	<b>-19*</b>	1*	<b>-40</b>	<b>-24</b>	-9*	-7*
<b>Reactions to “Mormons are racist”</b>						
Mormons Racist	<b>-33</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-50</b>	<b>-37</b>	-2	<b>-53</b>
Mormons Racist, But George Romney Supported Civil Rights	<b>-23*</b>	0*	<b>-50</b>	<b>-20*</b>	<b>-21*</b>	<b>-33*</b>
N	2310	981	1062	712	471	439

● Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Romney, compared to the baseline description.

● Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.

● For the “Not Christian” frames, an asterisk means that the cell is significantly different than “Mormons Not Christian” (without a counter-frame). For the “Racist” frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the “Mormons Racist” frame.

**Figure 2**



**Table 7. Reactions to the Obama Frames, By Levels of Political Knowledge**

	All	Low political knowledge	Medium political knowledge	High political knowledge
<b>Reactions to Obama’s church</b>				
Church hostile to whites	<b>-28</b>	<b>-38</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-24</b>
Hostile, but welcomes people of all races	<b>-30</b>	<b>-23*</b>	<b>-41</b>	<b>-29</b>
Hostile, teaches good values	<b>-32</b>	<b>-25*</b>	<b>-52*</b>	<b>-33</b>
<b>Reactions to “Obama is a Muslim”</b>				
Muslim	<b>-20</b>	-3	<b>-32</b>	<b>-26</b>
Muslim, but is Christian	<b>-1*</b>	2	<b>-23</b>	<b>10*</b>
N	1255	467	321	378

- Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Obama, compared to the baseline description.
- Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.
- For the “Obama is a Muslim” frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the “Muslim” frame.

**Table 8. Reactions to the Obama Frames, by Prior Favorability Toward Obama**

	All	Very/Somewhat favorable toward Obama (baseline)	Neutral/Have not heard enough to say (baseline)	Very/Somewhat unfavorable toward Obama (baseline)
<b>Reactions to Obama’s church</b>				
Church hostile to whites	<b>-28</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-33</b>
Hostile, but welcomes people of all races	<b>-30</b>	<b>-36</b>	<b>-29*</b>	<b>-21*</b>
Hostile, teaches good values	<b>-32</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-10*</b>	<b>-33</b>
<b>Reactions to Obama is a Muslim</b>				
Muslim	<b>-20</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-38</b>	<b>-19</b>
Muslim, but is Christian	<b>-1*</b>	<b>-8*</b>	<b>12*</b>	<b>-10</b>
N	1255	581	234	440

- Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Obama, compared to the baseline description.
- Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.
- For the “Obama is a Muslim” frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the “Muslim” frame.

**Table 9. Reactions to the Obama Frames, Partisanship and Religious Identity**

	All	Republican	Democrat	Born again	Catholic	No religion
<b>Reactions to Obama's church</b>						
Church hostile to whites	<b>-28</b>	<b>-49</b>	<b>-40</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-53</b>	-12
Hostile, but welcomes people of all races	<b>-30</b>	<b>-50</b>	<b>-28*</b>	<b>-36</b>	<b>-67</b>	4
Hostile, teaches good values	<b>-32</b>	<b>-48</b>	<b>-43</b>	<b>-34</b>	<b>-67</b>	-14
<b>Reactions to "Obama is a Muslim"</b>						
Muslim	<b>-20</b>	<b>-50</b>	03	<b>-25</b>	<b>-41</b>	<b>17</b>
Muslim, but is Xtian	<b>-1*</b>	<b>-28*</b>	<b>19*</b>	<b>-19</b>	<b>-3*</b>	<b>20</b>
N	1255	431	483	364	225	235

- Each cell indicates the percentage indicating that they are less (negative) or more (positive) likely to vote for Obama, compared to the baseline description.
- Bolded cells are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , two-tailed) in comparison to the baseline.
- For the "Obama is a Muslim" frames, an asterisk means that the counterframe condition is significantly different than the "Muslim" frame.