



An Examination of Political Nostalgia

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Introduction

Politicians have adopted different strategies for delivering their messages. Some have focused on messages on ‘hope’ and ‘change’ while others have focused more on a return to ‘American greatness.’ Utilizing these differences in speech content, the current study was designed with a twofold purpose in mind. First, to assess whether political speech content was capable of increasing state nostalgia. Second, to address the extent to which state nostalgia was capable of influencing support for political candidates. It was hypothesized that, depending on what type of political candidate was giving a speech, that liberals and conservatives would differ on their level of nostalgia and their degree of candidate support. Moderated-mediation was also assessed.

Method

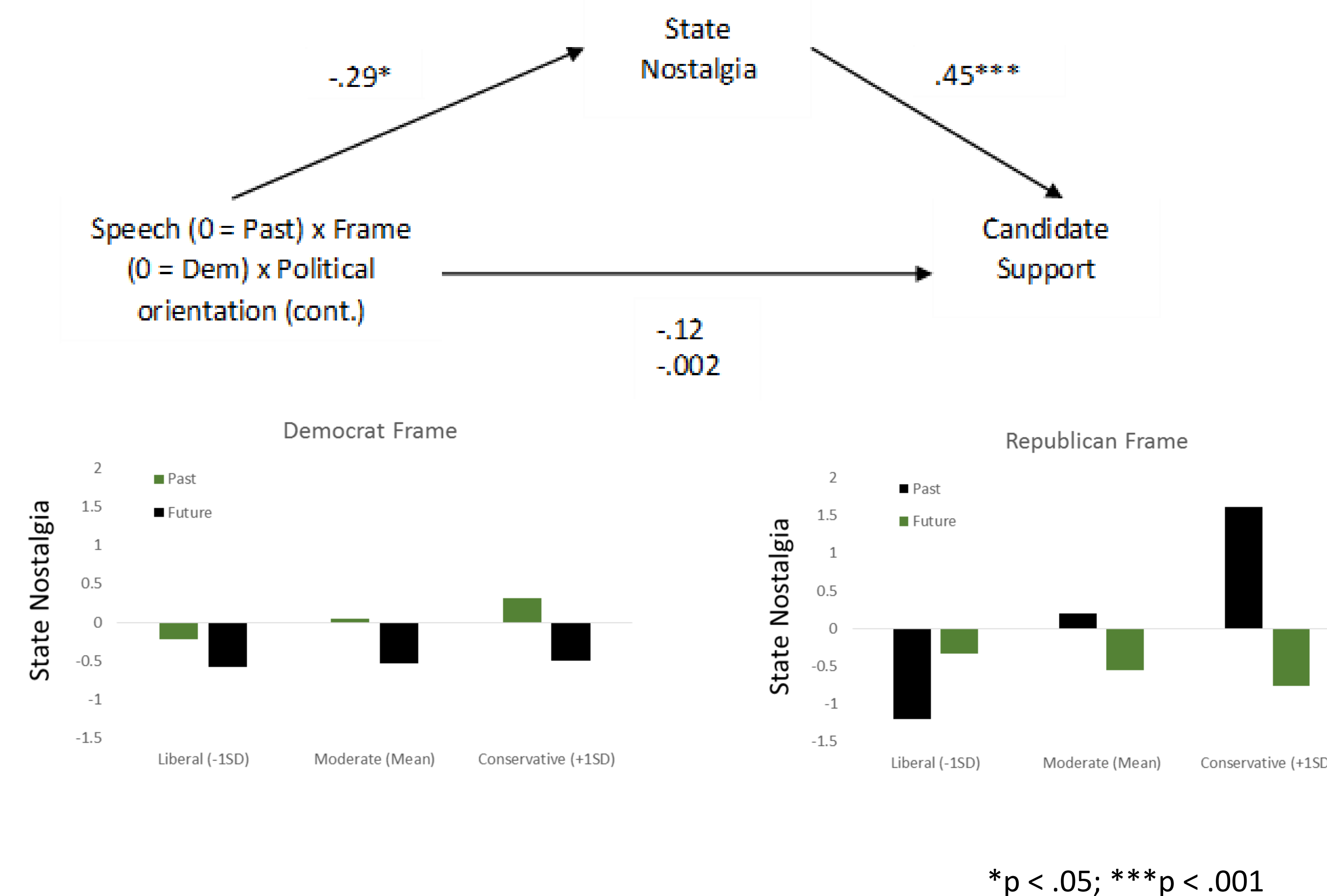
- Participants were sampled from both Amazon’s Mechanical Turk ($n = 143$) and from a university in the southwest United States ($n = 111$). The sample was mostly female (69.3%), Caucasian (87.8%), and Republican (45.7%) with an age range from 18-70 years ($M_{age} = 28.75$, $SD = 12.47$).
- Participants completed:
 - The Southampton Nostalgia Scale (SNS; Routledge et al., 2008) and two items assessing nostalgic thought (e.g., “How prone are you to feeling nostalgic”) to assess nostalgia proneness ($\alpha = .83$)
 - Individuals were randomly assigned to read a speech from a political candidate who was either a Democrat or Republican. The speech was either future oriented (e.g., “I stand before you tonight to tell you I am more optimistic about the future of America than ever before”) or past-oriented in content (e.g., “I stand before you tonight to tell you I am more optimistic about a return to true American values than ever before”).
 - Using a three-item assessment from previous research (Wildshut et al., 2006), current feelings of nostalgia (e.g., I feel nostalgic at this moment ; $\alpha = .98$) were assessed.

Method (cont.)

- The primary dependent measure was the extent to which people liked the fake political candidate (e.g., “How much do you support the speaker?”; $\alpha = .94$).
- Everyone was assessed on their degree of liberal and conservativeness, party affiliation, and the degree to which politics are important to them.

Results

- While controlling for nostalgia proneness, the past oriented speech ($M = 4.08$, $SE = .20$) increased feelings of nostalgia relative to the future oriented speech ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .20$), $F(1, 251) = 4.06$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .004$
- A 2(Frame: Dem, Rep) x 2(Speech: Past, Future) x Political Orientation (continuous) moderated hierarchical regression was conducted on Candidate support, $b = -.12$ ($SE = .09$), $t = -1.36$, $p = .18$, $R^2 = .006$, and State Nostalgia, $b = -.29$, ($SE = .12$), $t = 2.56$, $p = .01$, $R^2 = .02$
- Moderated-mediation: Using PROCESS (Model 12) the conditional indirect effects of state nostalgia were significant for moderates (CI: $-.63$, $-.01$) and conservatives (CI: -1.42 , $-.49$) under a Republican Frame. State nostalgia was a highly significant mediator of candidate support, $b = .39$ ($SE = .04$), $t = 9.52$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$



Discussion

- Results revealed that state nostalgia was significantly higher for moderates and conservatives who read a past-oriented speech framed as coming from a Republican
- State nostalgia was a highly significant mediator accounting for 21% of the observed variance in support for a fake gubernatorial candidate
- Overall, results demonstrate that past-oriented messages are most effective when delivered by conservatives to moderates and fellow conservatives.
- To date this research is the first to examine the influence of nostalgia in politics. Given the large practical effect, further research is necessary to determine what political nostalgia is and how it operates at a national level
- Given that support for actual candidates was not assessed, the current study should be interpreted with caution in regards to its practical importance.

References

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