



# ISSUE FRAMING AND PUBLIC OPINION OF THE U.S. SUPREME COURT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE 2012 HEALTHCARE DECISION

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## INTRODUCTION

Two years after its signing into law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), commonly called the Affordable Care Act (ACA), underwent a constitutional challenge at the Supreme Court.

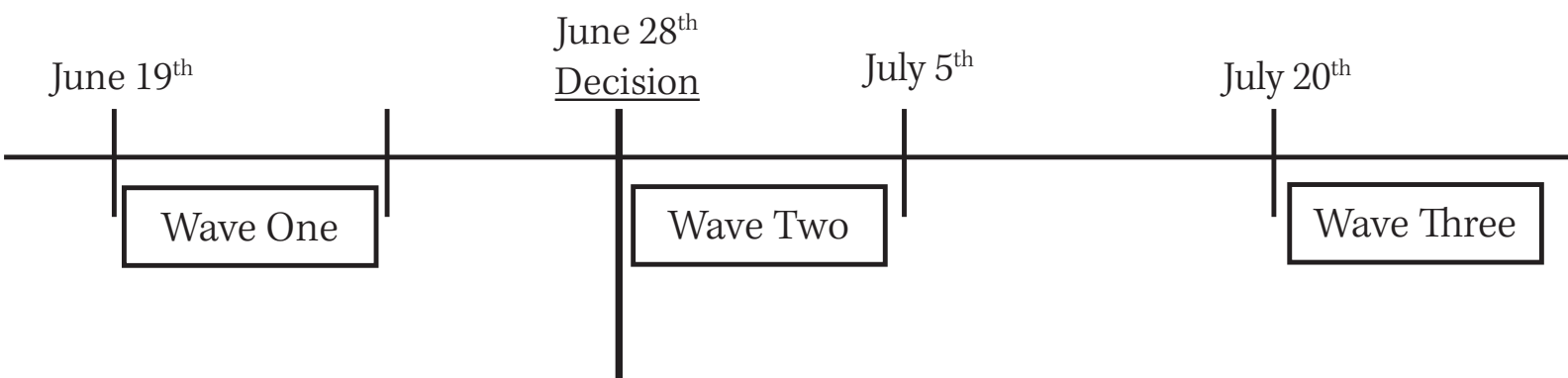
The focus here is to determine whether the Supreme Court was able to frame arguments used for or against the ACA in relation to the decision. By organizing and analyzing open-ended responses gathered from a panel survey both before and after the 2012 decision, I sought to determine how arguments used in discussion about the law, and thus, public opinion regarding it varied after the decision.

*Hypothesis:* Supreme Court decisions shift the frames that people use when discussing policy.

## METHODS

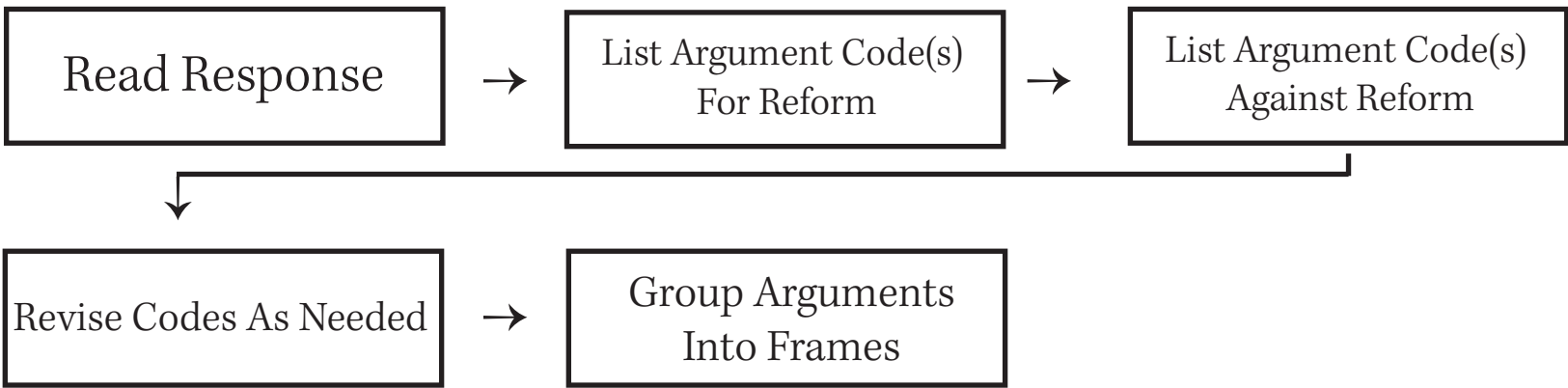
The data used here comes from a M-Turk panel surveys conducted in the summer of 2012 around the ACA decision (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Timeline of Surveys



In the three waves analyzed, there were respectively 1,242, 856, and 751 respondents who answered an open-ended question regarding their arguments for or against healthcare reform, which was then coded (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Coding Scheme



## ANALYSIS

In order to examine how the public opinion shifts in response to the Court decision at the individual level, I compare the average use of each of the four following frames: *Policy Aspects*, *Policy Externalities*, *Government/ Ideology*, and *Legalistic* across each wave.

The average use of each frame was quite stable throughout the waves, that is overall, the Court ruling on the issue did not lead to drastic changes in argument usage (Fig. 3).

Because this case was salient and politically charged, it is expected that opinion varies by whether respondents were making supportive or oppositional arguments in their responses. Those who used more negative language in describing their views, tended to shift from focusing on the policy aspects of the reform to the government and ideology aspects (Fig 4).

Policy Aspects Policy Externalities Government/Ideology Legalistic

Fig. 3 Average Use of Argument Types Across Waves

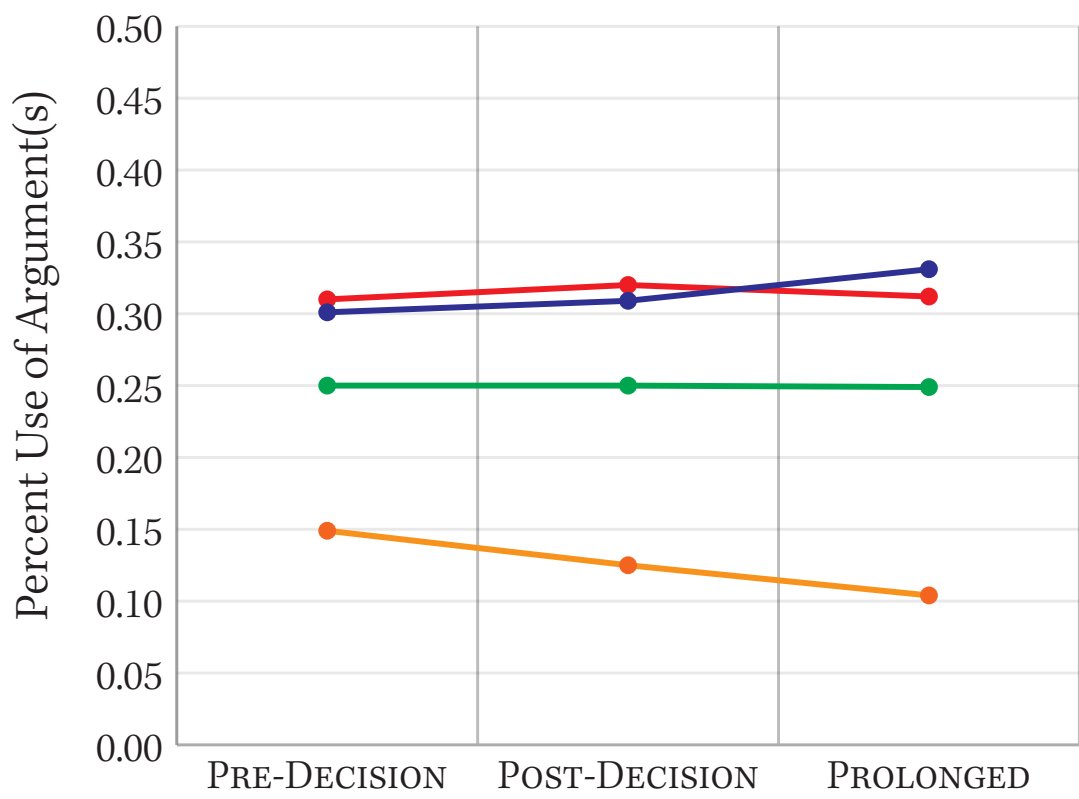


Fig. 4 Argument Type by Wave for Positive and Negative Arguments

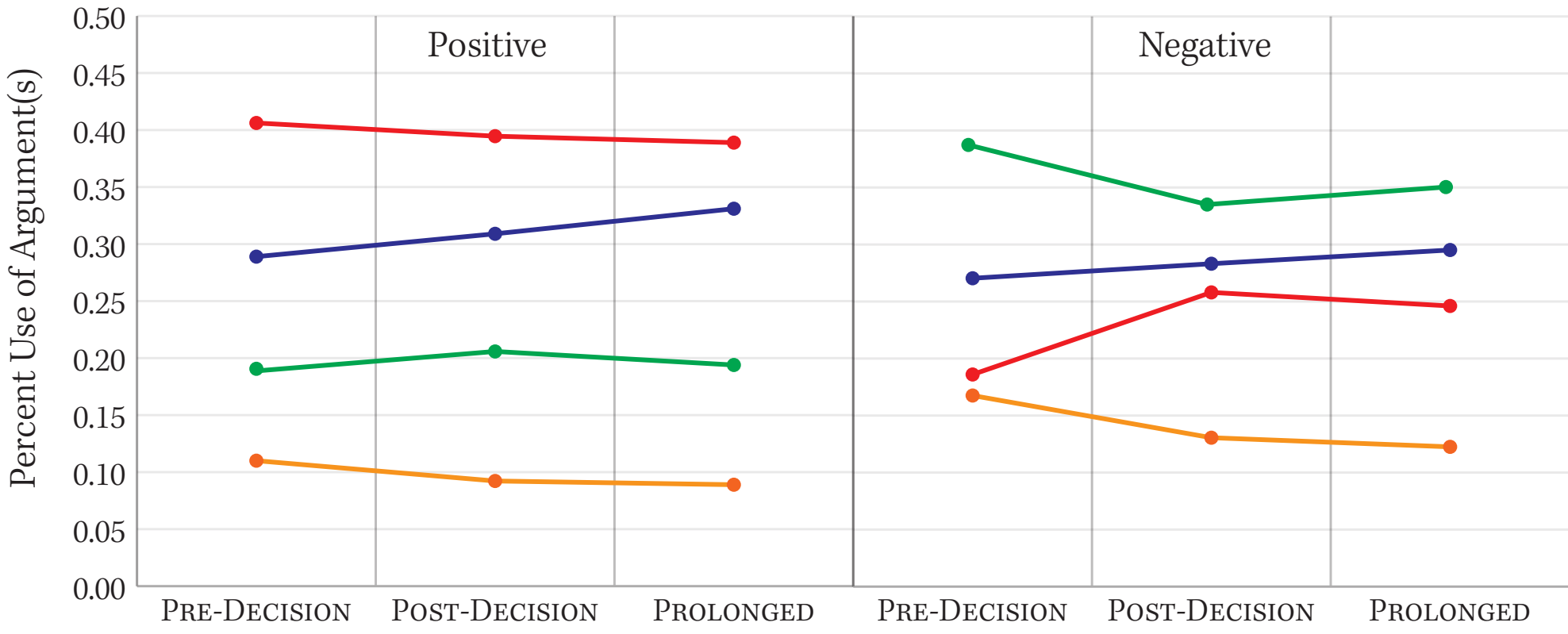


Fig. 5 Argument Type by Wave for Positive and Negative Arguments for Low Legitimacy Respondents

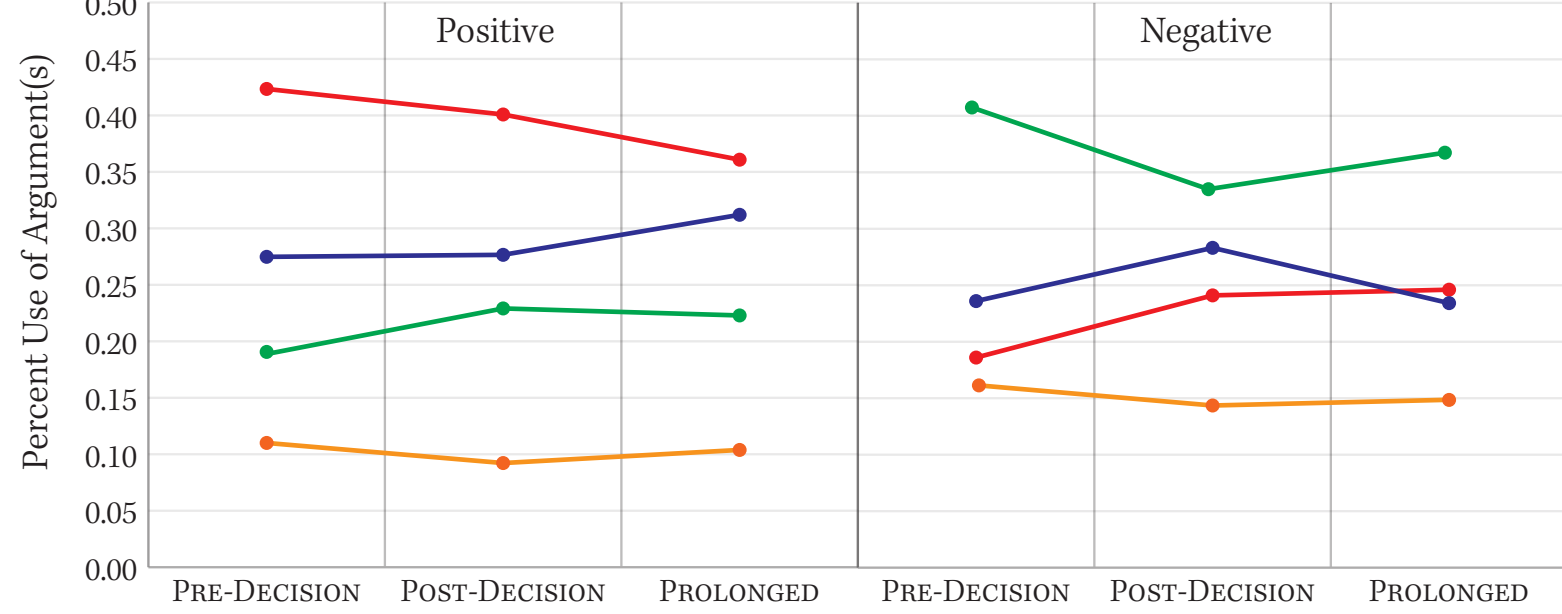
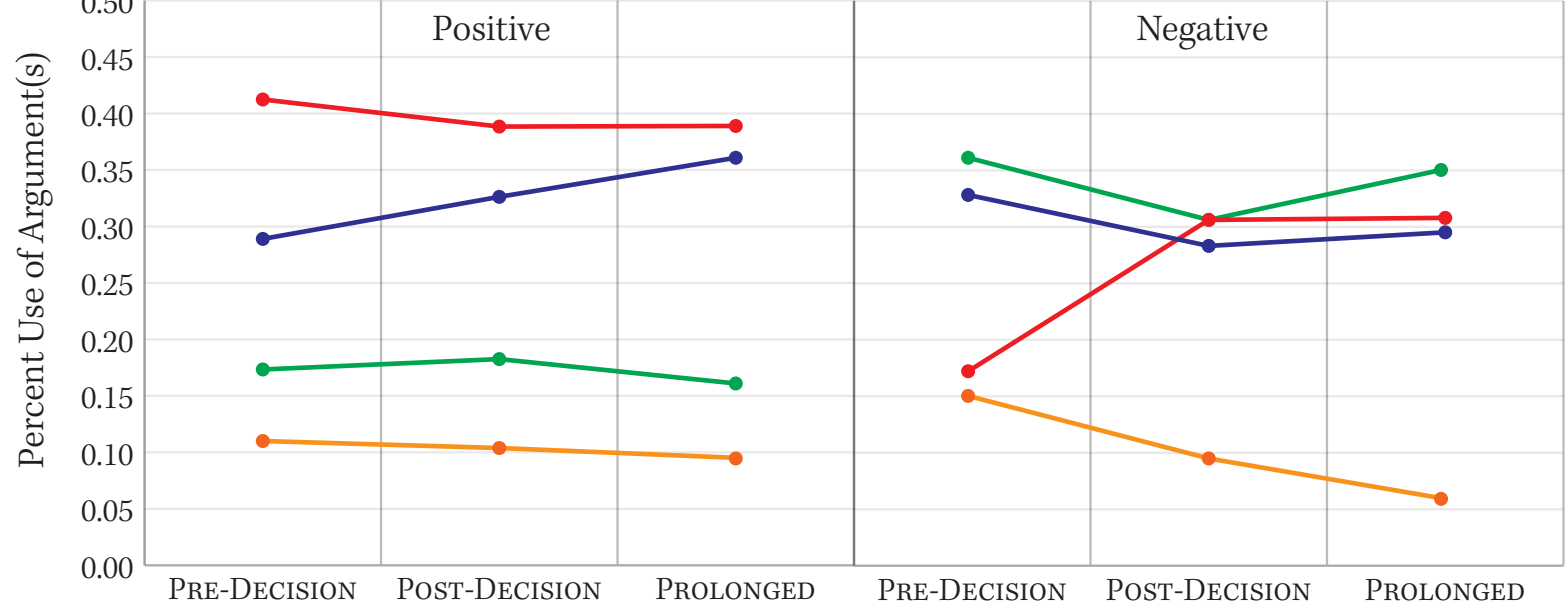


Fig. 6 Argument Type by Wave for Positive and Negative Arguments for High Legitimacy Respondents



## CONCLUSIONS

Controlling for respondents notions of legitimacy and partisanship, there are patterns that start to emerge:

Those for healthcare reform focus on aspects of the policy, while those against focus on government and ideology (Fig. 4).

Those with high legitimacy opposing the reform are less likely to use legalistic arguments and more policy-based ones in their arguments following the Court's ruling (Fig. 6).

Those who are more partisan would tend to focus on less legalistic language, seeing the ruling as a "win" or "loss" for their party (Fig. 8).

Fig. 7 Argument Type by Wave for Positive and Negative Arguments for Low Partisans

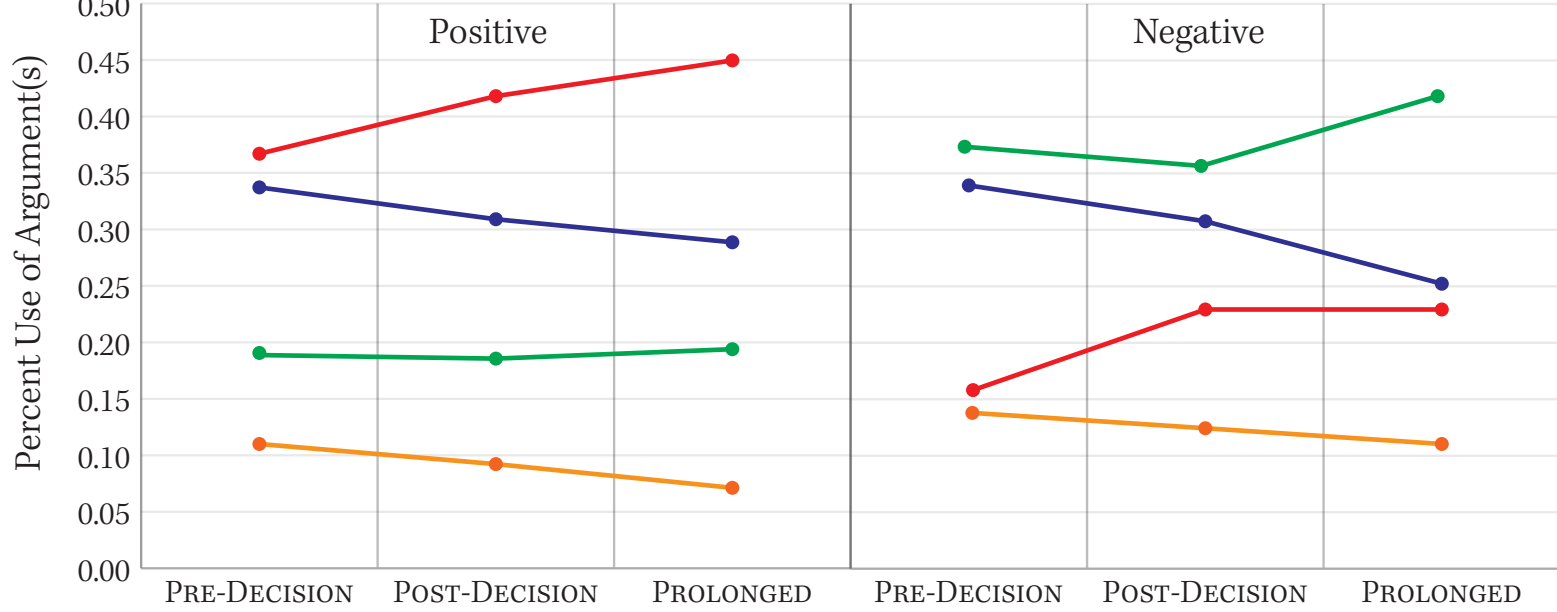
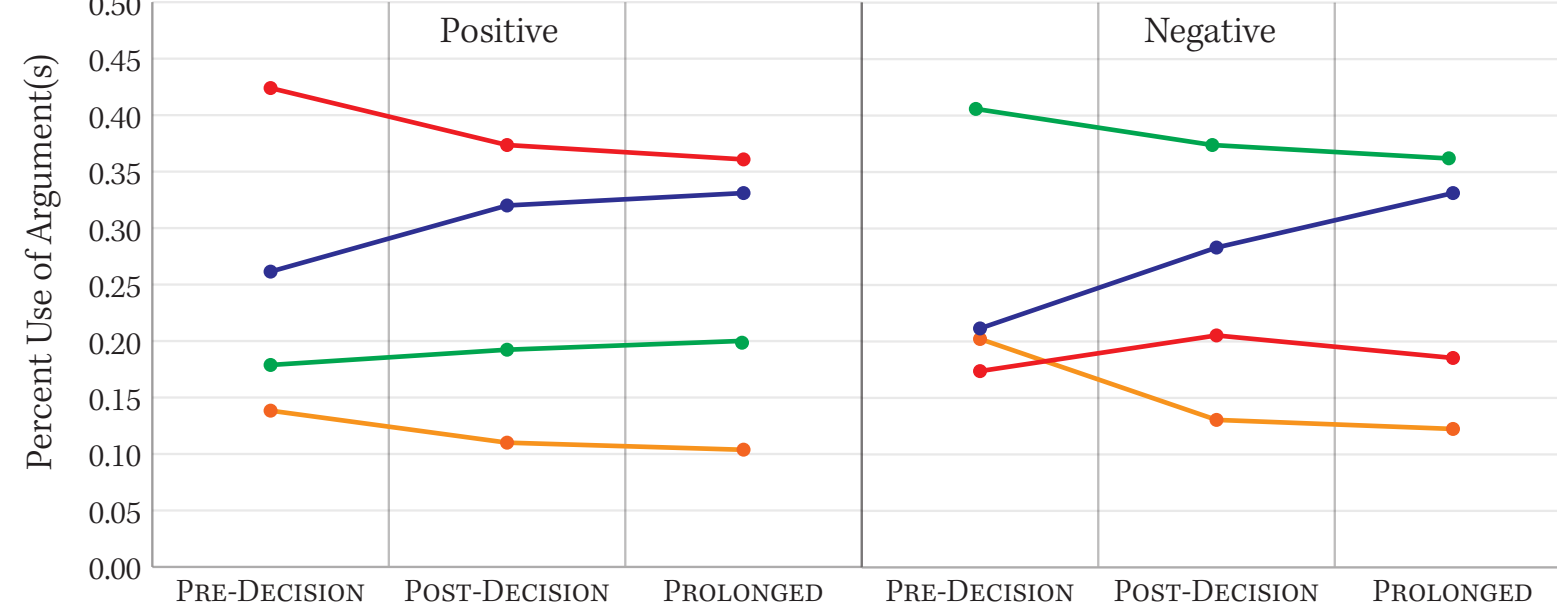


Fig. 8 Argument Type by Wave for Positive and Negative Arguments for High Partisans



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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