

# Baumgartner, POLI 195 Spring 2013

Shifting Frames of the Death Penalty

Reading: Radelet and Borg

Also general background on framing

February 18, 2013

# Skip Stam's talk

- Broadly reflective of how many people think
- He is in a position of great power in NC
- He may introduce legislation to repeal RJA
- Deterrence and morality: if it deters, we have an obligation to save lives by executing...
- Other points, reactions, discussion

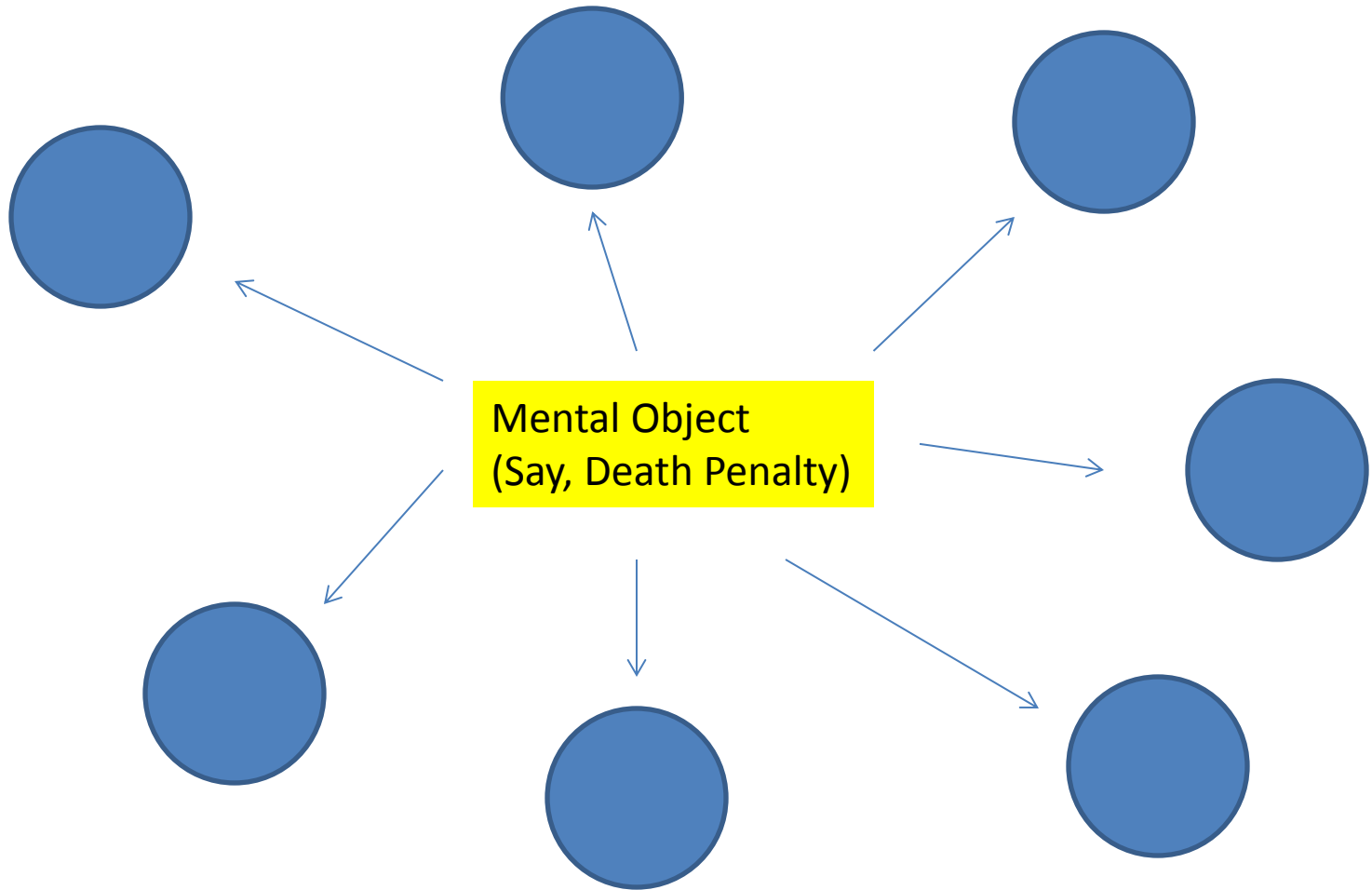
# Framing

- Object and associations
- Multidimensionality of all complex issues
- Some issues that have been reframed
- What does it take to do this

# Radelet and Borg

- Article published in 2000
- Reviewing post-1972 opinion, etc.
- Decline: deterrence, incapacitation, cost, religion
- Increase: retribution, caprice, race, class, possibility of errors
- Shifts in public opinion relate to these changes in frames
- Public opinion difficult to study because the questions are so abstract, so may not reflect how juries will decide, because their work is not abstract at all

# Objects and Associations



# Associations: Things your brain associated with the object

- Death Penalty associations (different for each individual, but might include):
  - Vicious murderer
  - Horrific crime
  - Make the killer pay
  - My uncle is crazy when he talks about this
  - My mother never said a positive thing about it
  - It doesn't work
  - Maybe it does work
- (No necessary logic to these thoughts or associations, where ever your brain goes is an association)

# Framing: Focusing attention on one aspect of an issue rather than another

- Increase the salience of certain associations, reduce the importance of others
  - (Humans don't have the capacity to be comprehensively rational, or to consider appropriately all the relevant factors: think of the problem of choosing where to go to college, no way could you know all the relevant facts about every US college and university, so you came here!)
- Death penalty: Retribution? Deterrence? Race? Social Class? Geographical arbitrariness? Vicious criminals need to be eliminated? Too much crime in America?

# Individual and collective framing

- Individual framing: affecting how YOU or any other single individual reacts to the object
  - Just changing how the question is posed, or how you introduce the question, can affect people's responses
  - Public opinion studies, experiments
  - Racial bias frame: + or – 12 point change in opinion
  - Innocence, error frame: - 12 point change in opinion



# Collective Frames

- How the country as a whole changes over time
- For example, study media coverage of the same issue over time, see how the focus changes
- Surprisingly, even for the same issue, frames can change a lot over time.

# Examples of issues that have been reframed in my lifetime

- Smoking and tobacco
- Nuclear power
- Child abuse
- Handicapped access to public spaces, equal rights for the disabled
- Title IX and women's sports

# Longer-term examples

- Prohibition was adopted by 18 countries, including Russia, around World War One
  - No one later decided drinking was good; rather they reacted against:
    - Ineffectiveness of the policy
    - Rise in organized crime
- Women's vote, right to work, equal pay, etc. (still a work in progress!)

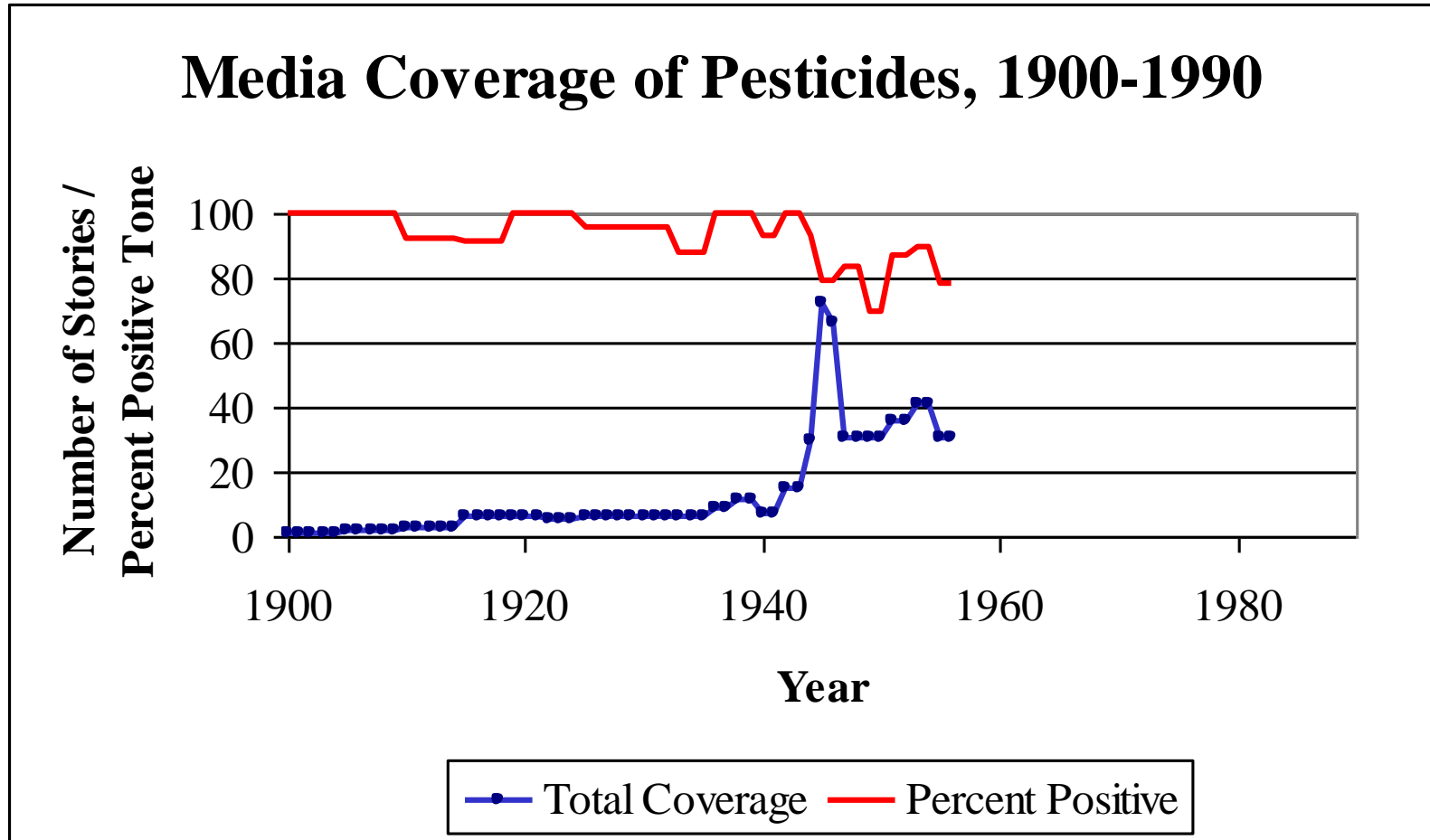
# In your lifetime

- Gay rights, cutting edge of equality movement
- Note the framing aspect of this, think of it in terms of “objects” (Gays) and “associations”
  - Support, adoption of gay lifestyle (previously more prominent)
  - Recognition of freedom of choice, equal rights
- How hard this was to change, but how significant the change is, and permanent

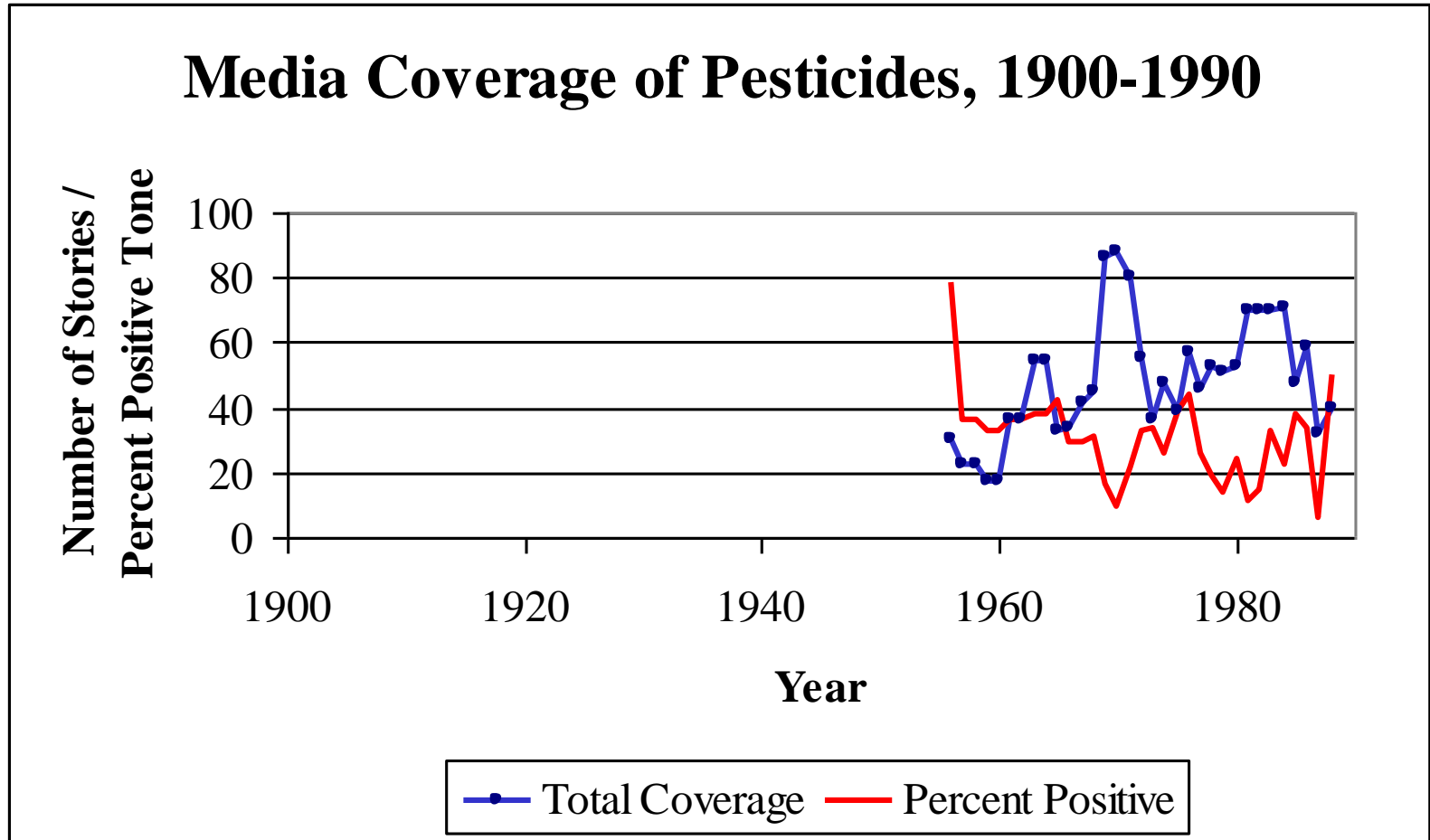
# Multidimensionality and the inevitability of framing

- Most public policies have many many implications, some good and some bad
- Most public discussion, at any given time, focuses on just a small subset of these dimensions
- When attention changes from one to another dimension, a frame has shifted.
- This may lead to changes in public policy

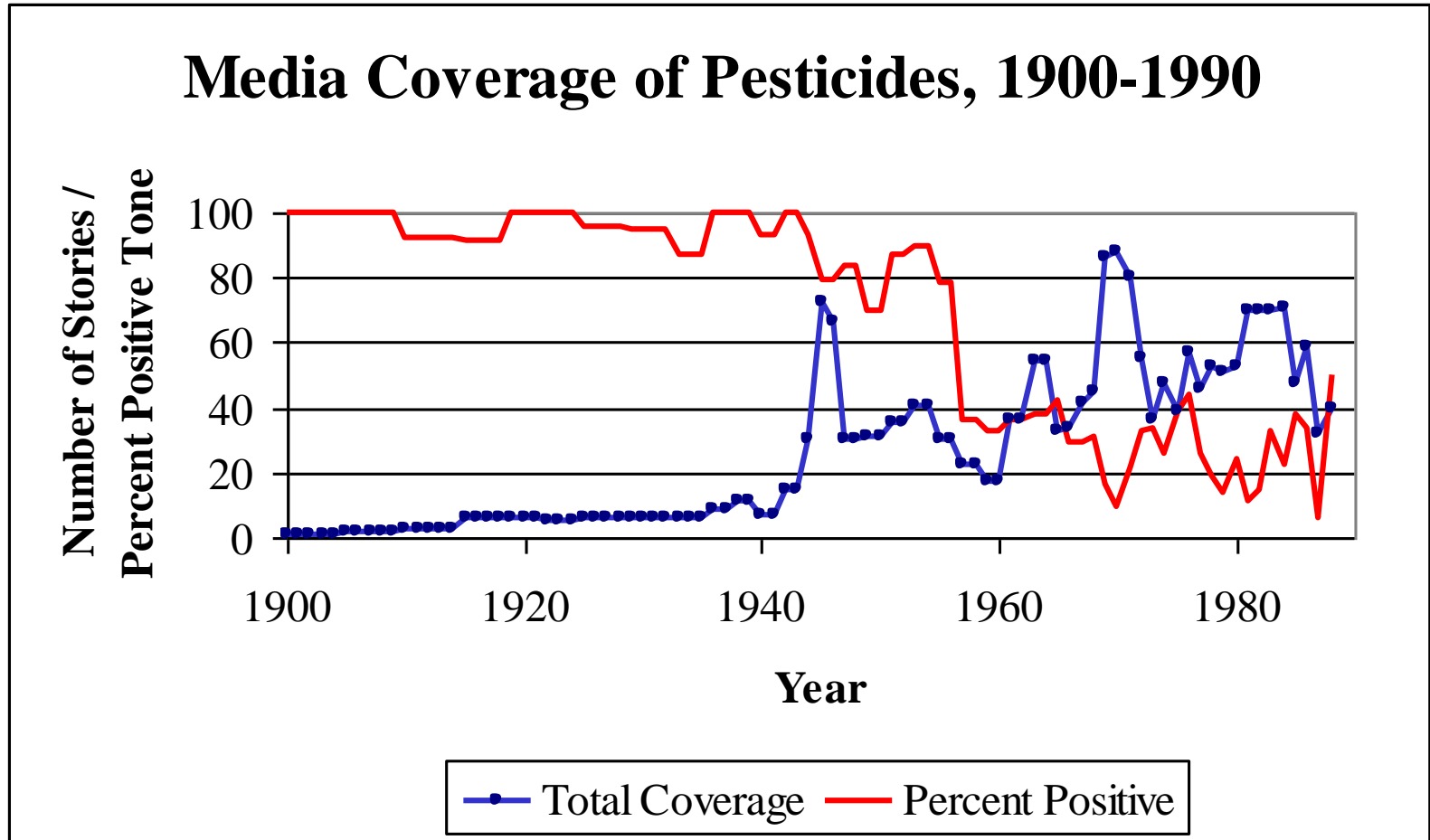
# Pesticides: Looking good after World War Two



# Pesticides: No longer such good news after 1956



# Pesticides: From green revolution to nobody's baby





# How often does this occur?

- Punctuated equilibrium theory:
  - Rare that frames shift.
  - Many forces maintain equilibrium in public discussion over time. The status quo has great power.
  - However, occasionally, things come together in a perfect storm and things shift.
  - If you look me up in google scholar, that's my claim to fame (such as it is!)

# How does this occur?

- Frames don't just shift, someone has to push the new frame
- Social movements
- New scientific facts
- Slow accumulation of things reach a tipping point
- Wednesday's class: the development of the "innocence movement" – ch 3 in your reading