Notes from 2008 Death Penalty Book on Framing
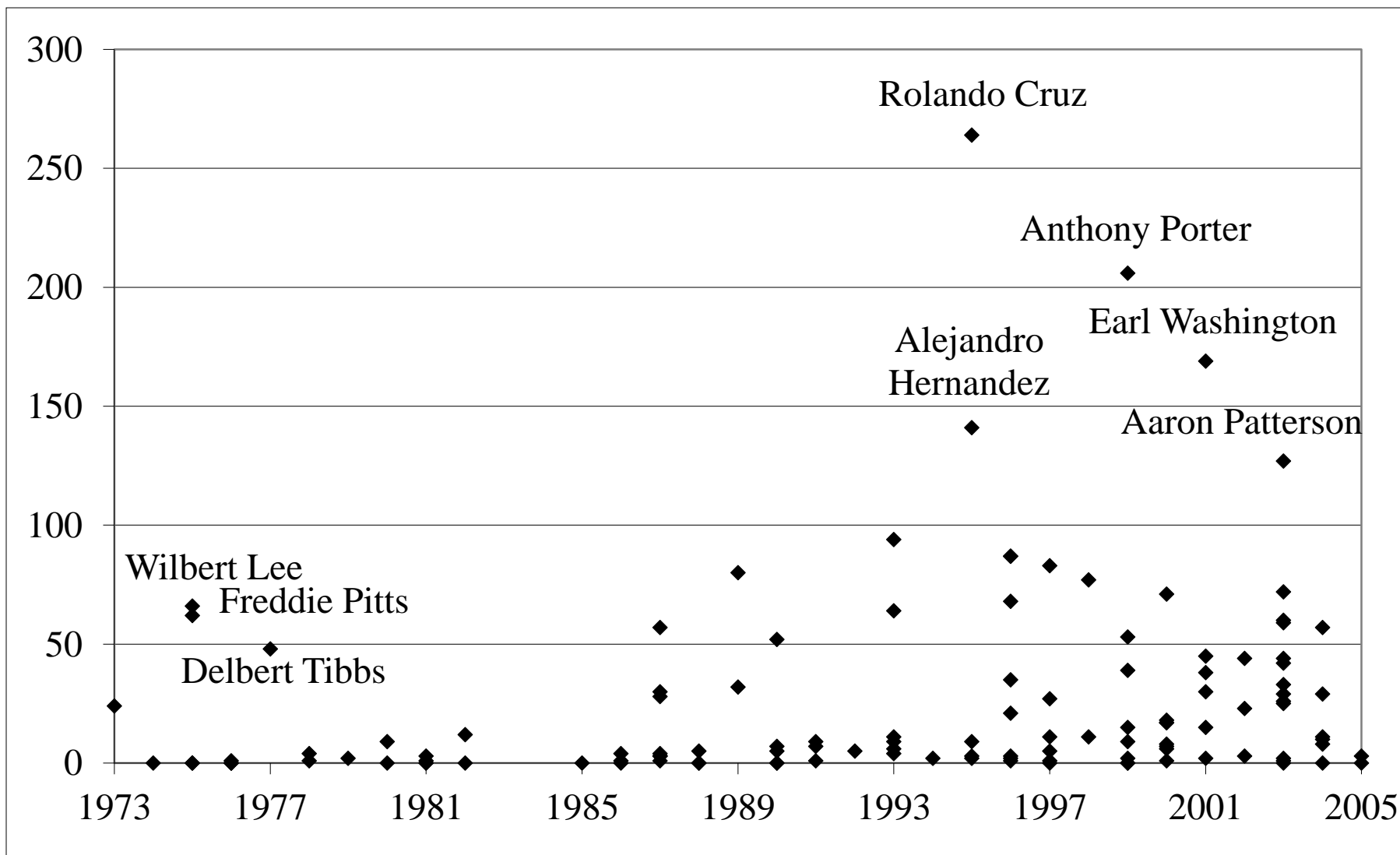
Baumgartner, POLI 421

October 25, 2016

Individual events don't automatically generate the same amount of news coverage

- Next slides refer to individuals who have been set free because they were innocent, after having served on death row.
- At the time of the book, in 2008, there were 124.
- Today there are about 156
- Interesting thing: each one, on average, became more newsworthy over time.

- Possible comparison: police shootings. Look up names of individuals shot in previous decades. How much coverage? How long did it last? Compare to recent cases. Why the difference?

Exonerees: From Human Interest to Confirmation of an Established Theme

A Framing Multiplier Effect

Time Period	Average Exonerations	Average Stories	Stories per Exon.
73-91	3	9	3
92-98	4	85	33
99-05	7	212	40

A Social Cascade

Somehow, the concept of innocence has entered the social discourse. People understand a new way of thinking about the death penalty.

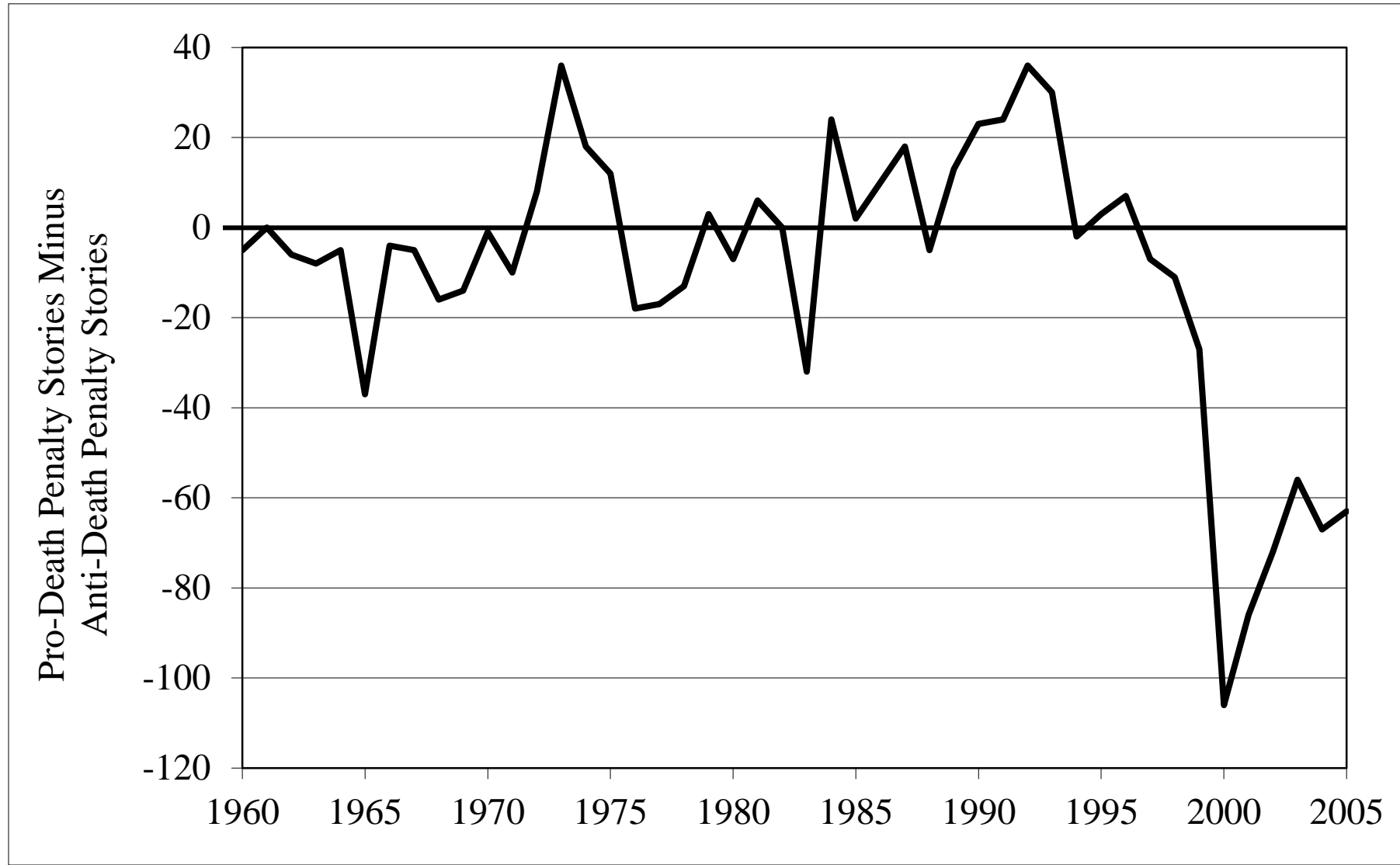Old issue-definition: Morality / constitutionality

New issue-definition: Innocence / system is broken / human institutions cannot be perfect

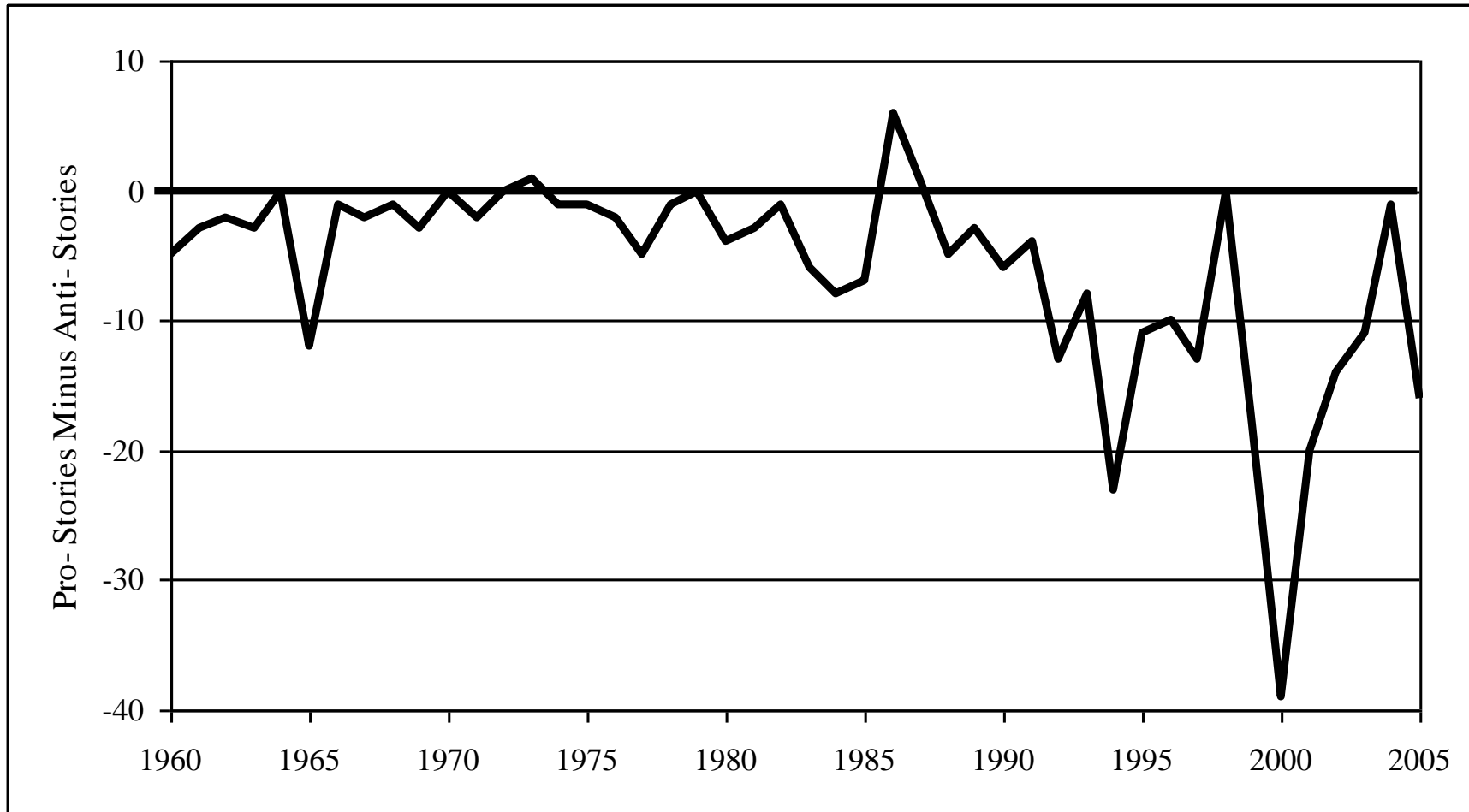Documenting these trends and this cascade effect is our goal.

Second Part: Measuring "Tone" of Death Penalty Stories: Pro- minus Anti- Stories

- Very simple idea:

- Are people reading more stories that make them believe the death penalty is routinely being administered, needs to be expanded, should be supported, was just applied successfully…

- Or, are they reading more stories that suggest: it is flawed, it is inappropriate, it is being restricted, it is no longer being used much, it is often or was just botched, that there are problems with it?
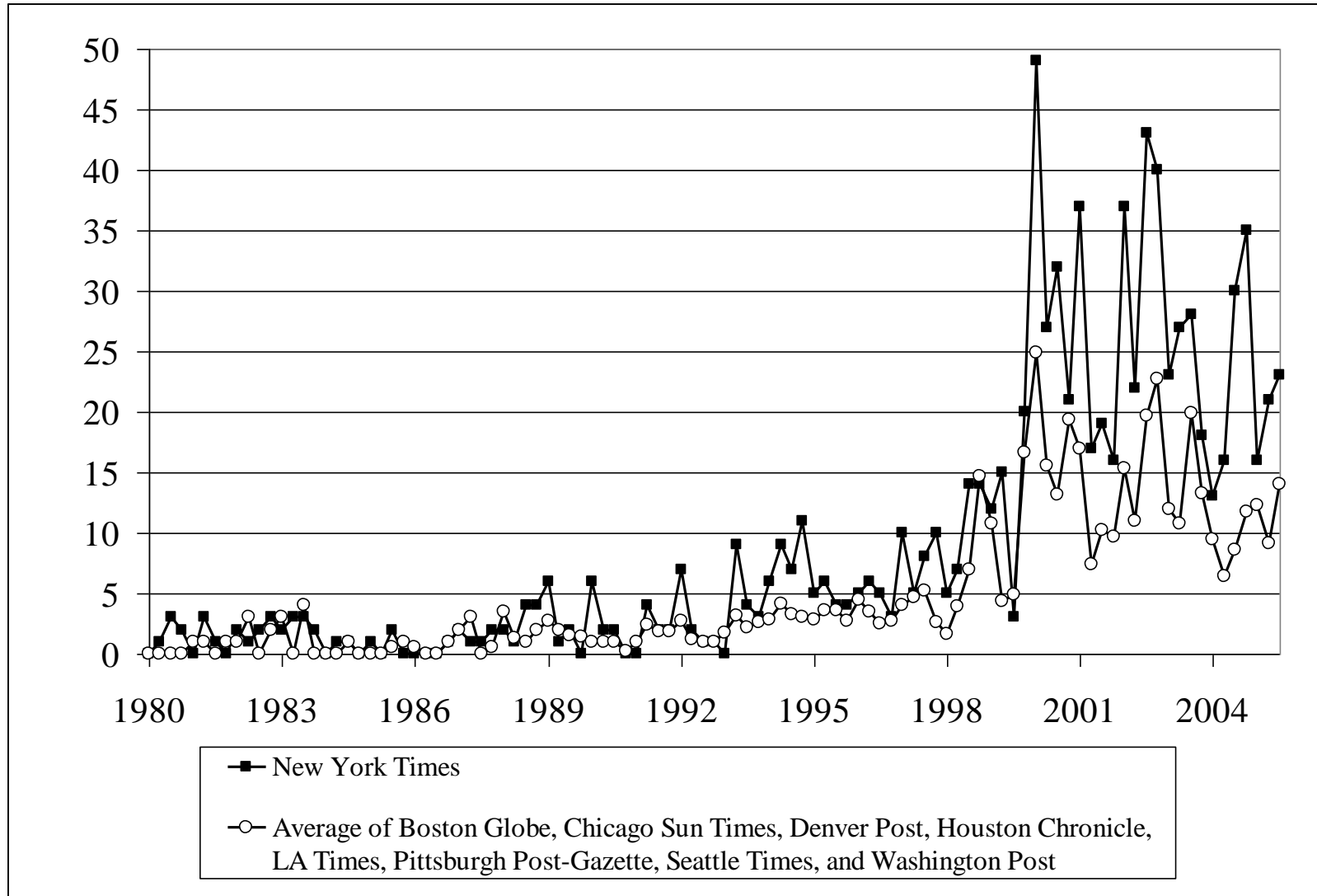
The "Net Tone" of NYT Coverage, 1960–2005

The "Net Tone" of Readers' Guide, 1960–2005

"Innocence" in the NYTimes v. Other Papers

New York Times

Average of Boston Globe, Chicago Sun Times, Denver Post, Houston Chronicle, LA Times, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Seattle Times, and Washington Post

Conclusions from *NYT* analysis

- Innocence frame is the single most powerful media frame in history
- It equals the constitutionality focus of the 1960s and 1970s
- It surpasses that frame in amount of coverage
- It brings together previously existing arguments, such as the racial disparity argument, but puts it in a new context
- It is not just in the NYTimes
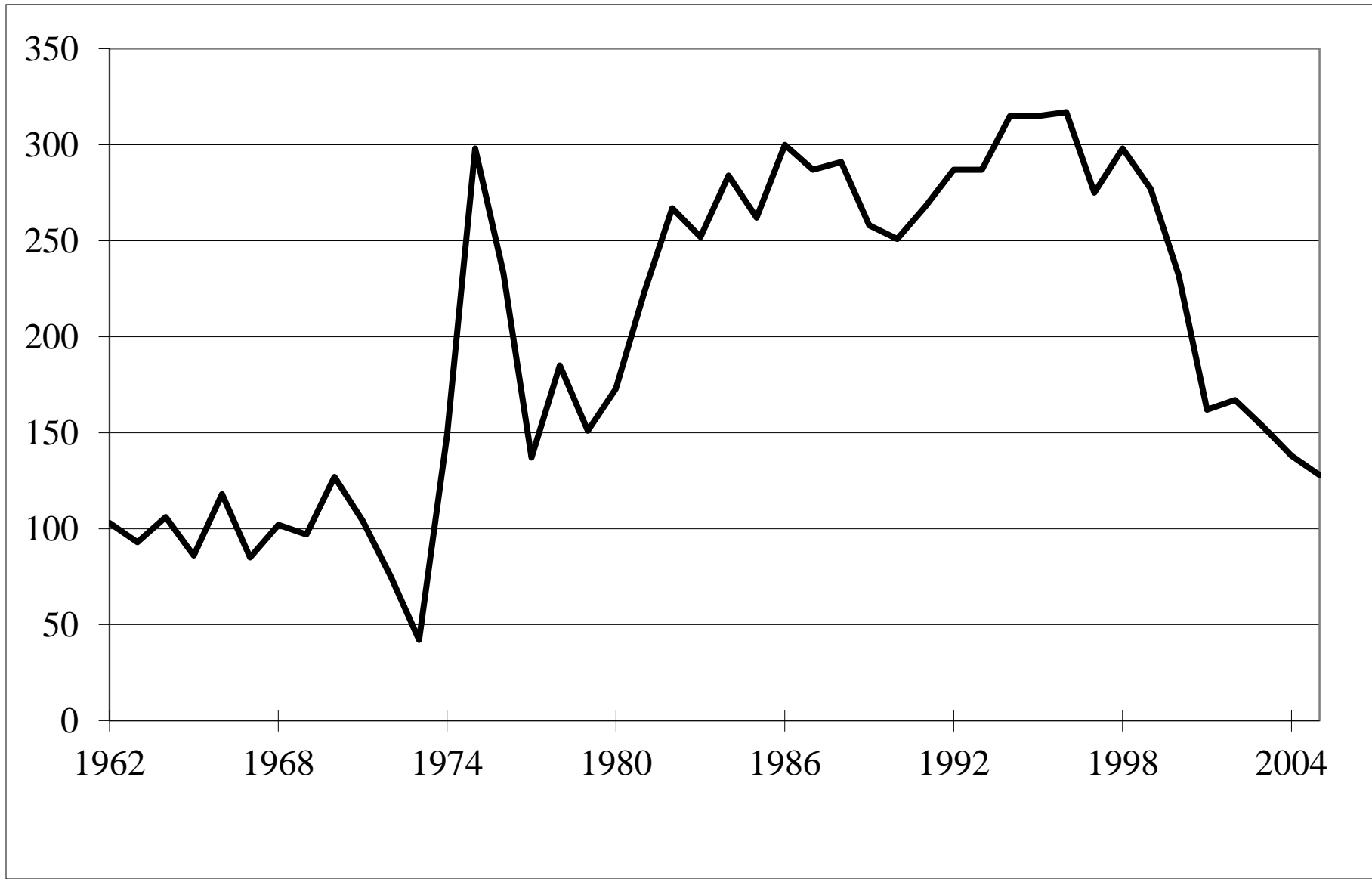- Most important: How people respond to it…

Policy Impact

Annual Death Sentences as the most appropriate dependent variable

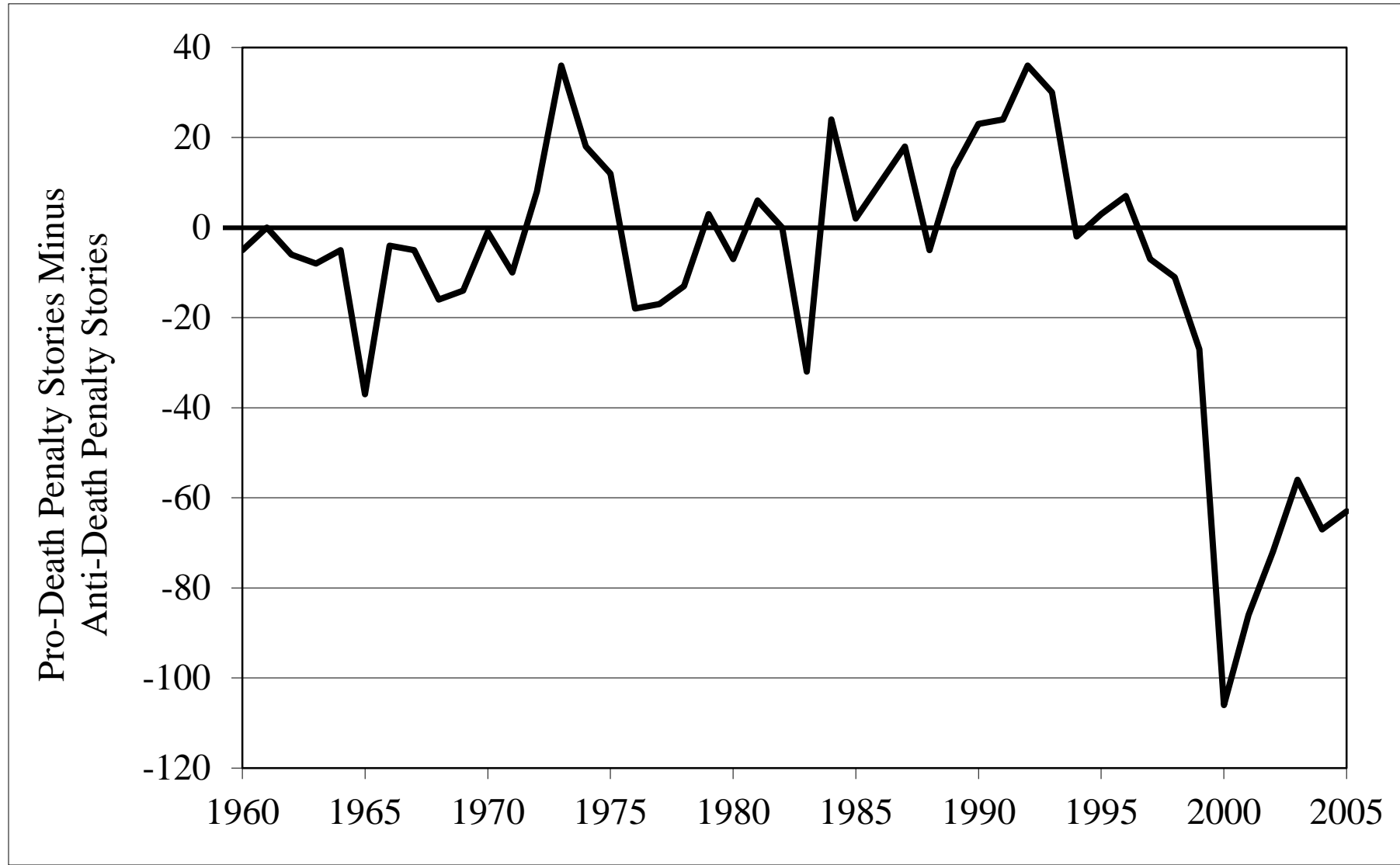Juries not faced with a hypothetical question as posed in surveys

Juries presented with strong stimulus, not like aggregate public opinion

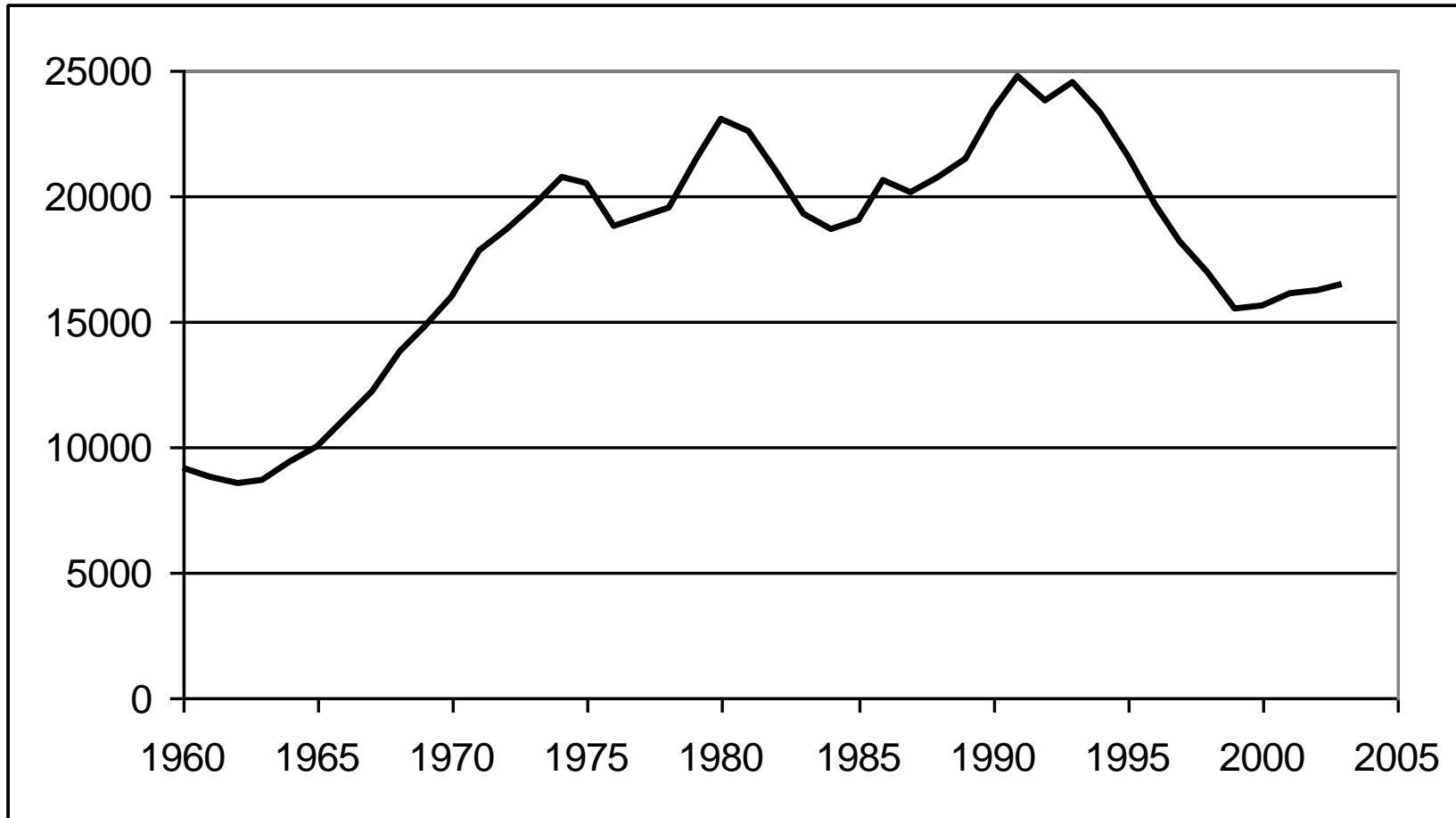May be different, should definitely be less inertial

Reminder: Number of Death Sentences

Reminder: "Net Tone" of NYT Coverage

Homicides: decline from 24,500 in 1993 to 15,500 in 2000
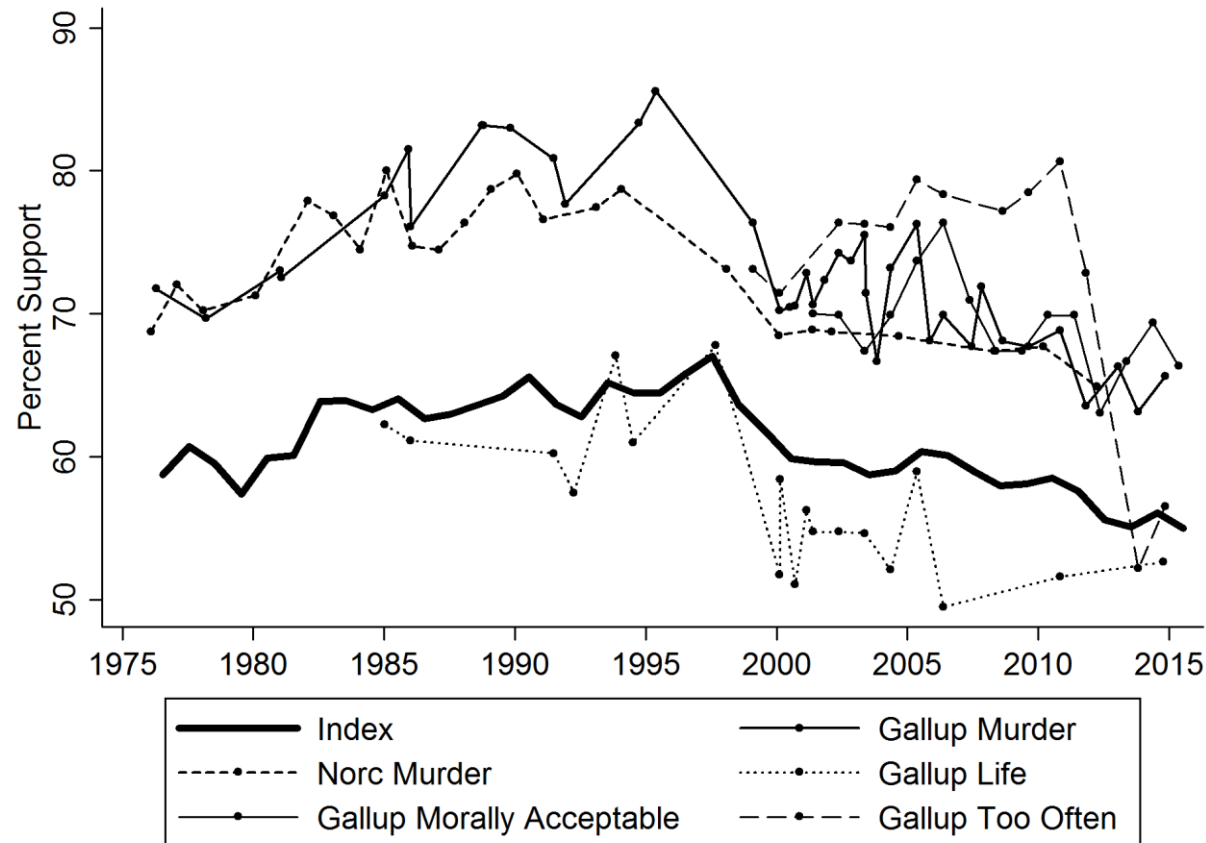
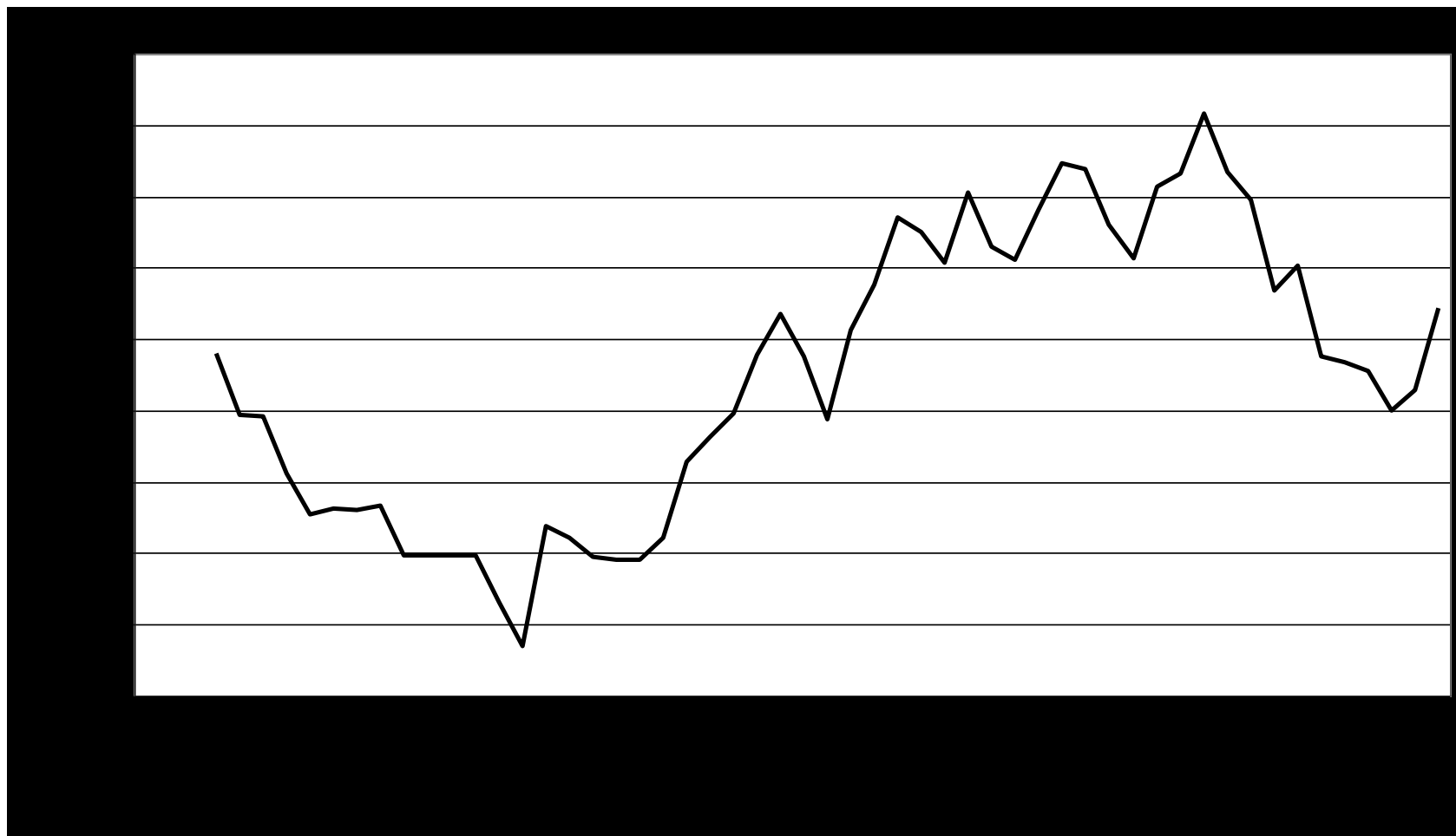

NB: France, UK, approx 400 per year

Measuring Public Opinion

- 65 different questions posed in identical manner by the same survey organization

- 292 surveys used from 1960 to 2004 to construct the index

- The index is based on Jim Stimson's method of combining survey data, as used in his construction of the measure of "public mood"

- It is similar to a factor analysis, using all available data, focusing on trends over time

Our index on the death penalty, similar to Enns' index on crime more generally
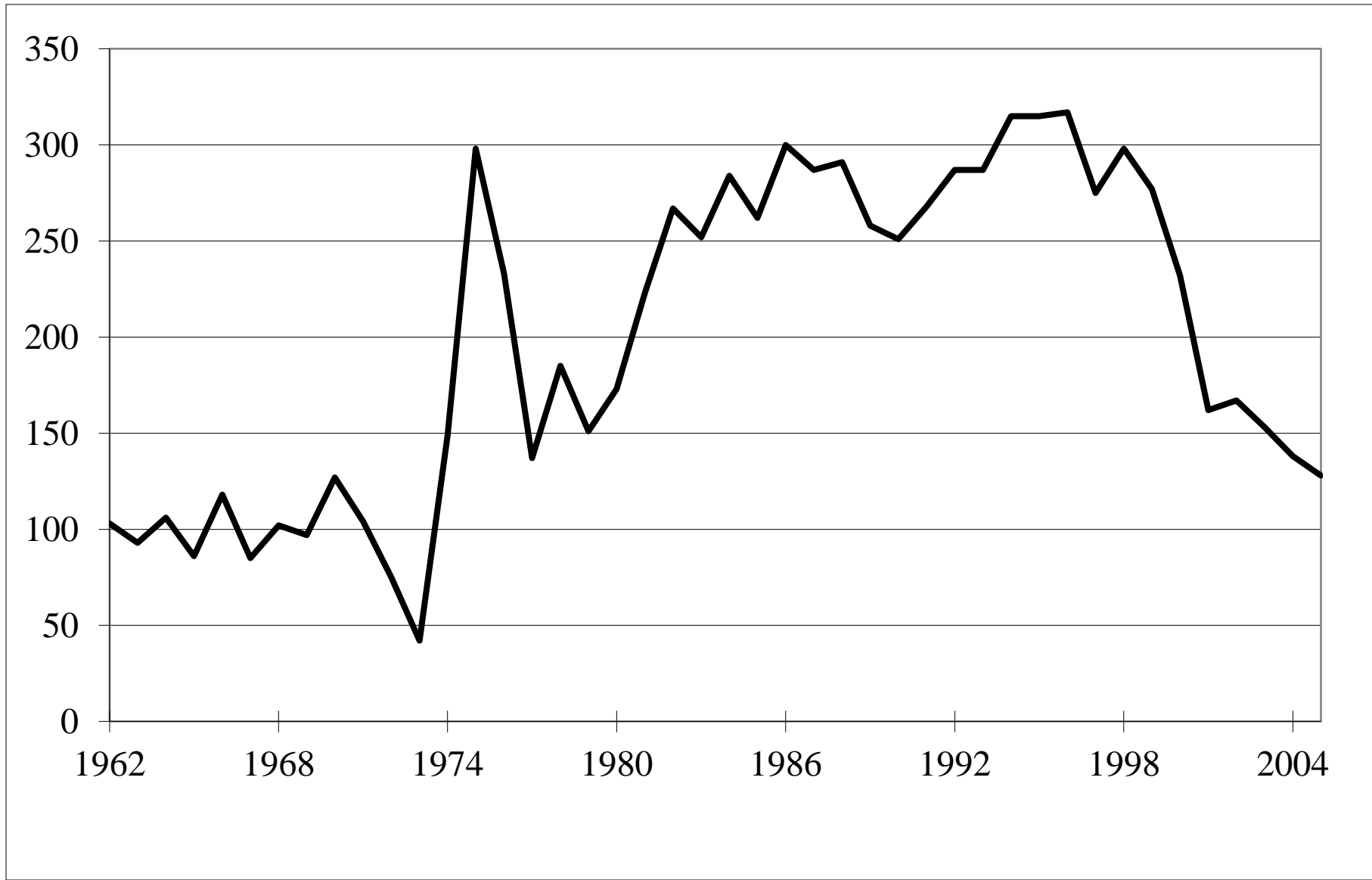
Net Public Opinion, 1953-2004

Number of Death Sentences
Can We Predict this Series?

Predicting Annual Death Sentences

Annual Number of Death Sentences =

22.92 (19.20)+

0.316 x Sentences$_{t-1}$ (0.097) +

0.453 x Net Tone of *New York Times*$_{t-1}$ (0.137) +

0.817 x Homicides (thousands)$_{t-1}$ (1.437) +

5.059 x Opinion$_{t-1}$ (1.069) +

-67.80 x 1973 dummy (25.80) +

129.49 x 1975 dummy (25.34)

R^2 = .930 (N=42)

Note: Analysis is annual from 1963 to 2005.

Predicted and Actual Death Sentences

Interpretation

0.316 x Sentences$_{t-1}$ (0.097)

The series has some inertia to it; 32% of each value carries forward.

This is significantly less than what we saw for public opinion; that series was much more inertial, or slowly moving. Juries respond more quickly than aggregate public opinion to new events.

Each additional independent variable also has some inertial impact into the future as well. $(1 / (1-.316) = 1.46$ x immediate effect)

Interpretation

0.453 x Net Tone of *New York Times*$_{t-1}$ (0.137)

A 10-point shift in news coverage: 4.5 fewer death sentences in the following time period, with a longer term impact of 6.7 fewer.

1992: Net tone = +36

2000: Net tone = -106

Shift of 142 points

Expected impact: 98 death sentences

Interpretation

.817 x Homicides (thousands)$_{t-1}$ (1.437)

Move homicides by 8,000:

Decline in death sentences: 10 per year

(Effect is small, and statistically insignificant)

Interpretation

$5.059 \times \text{Opinion}_{t-1}$ (1.069)

This is a big impact:

In the long term, after inertia plays out:

15 point shift in opinion: 111 fewer death sentences

Public Opinion
(Results from Chapter 6, quarterly model)

Manipulation	Effect
Reduce Net Tone of NYT by 50	-7.46
Reduce homicides by 2,000	-6.80

So homicides do affect sentences, indirectly through public opinion.

Media framing, however, shows both a significant effect on public opinion, and a direct effect on sentencing, in addition to the indirect effect.
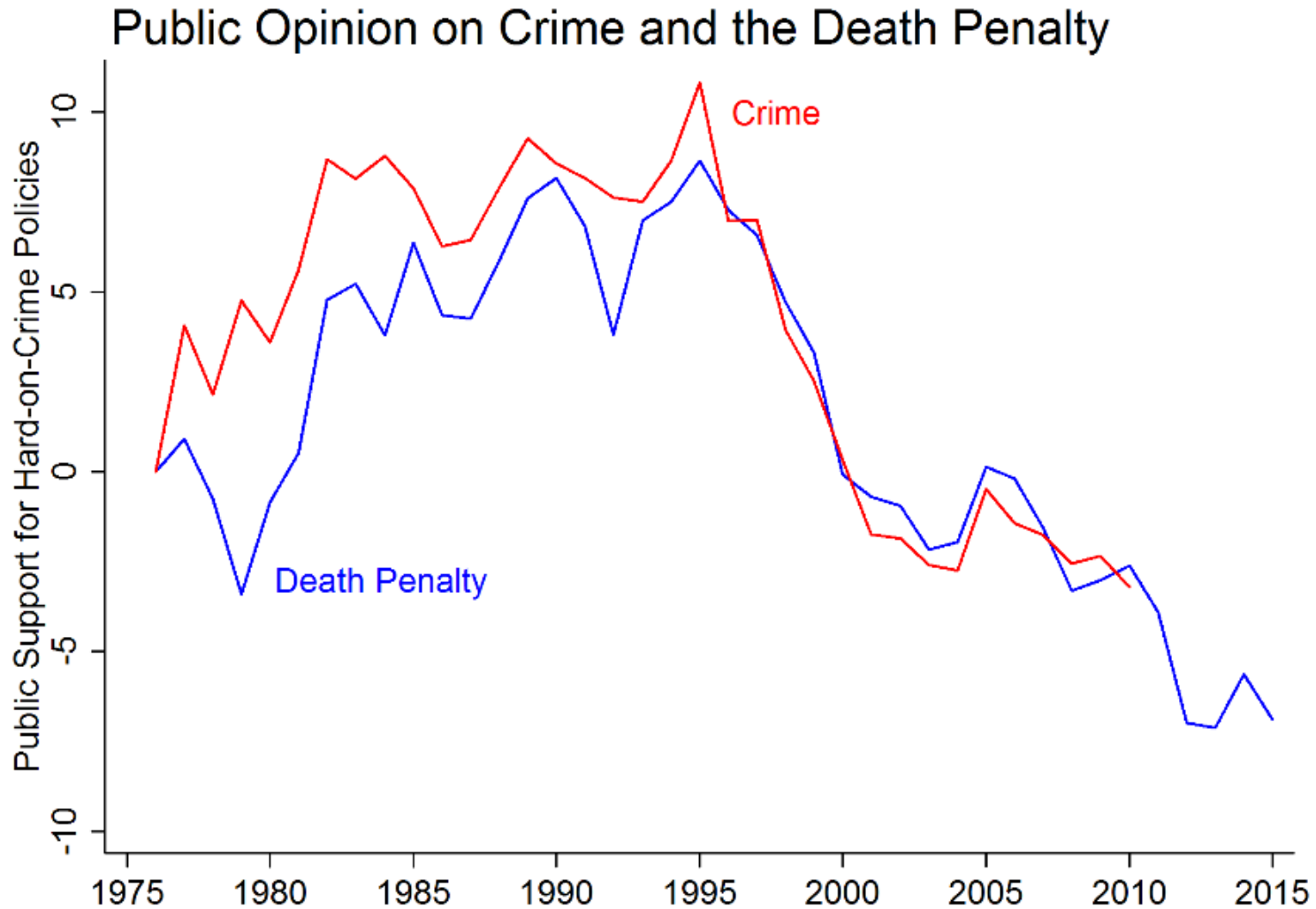
Interpretation

The tone of media coverage affects both aggregate public opinion and, separately, jury and prosecutor behavior.

Public opinion changes slowly but has a strong impact on jury behavior.
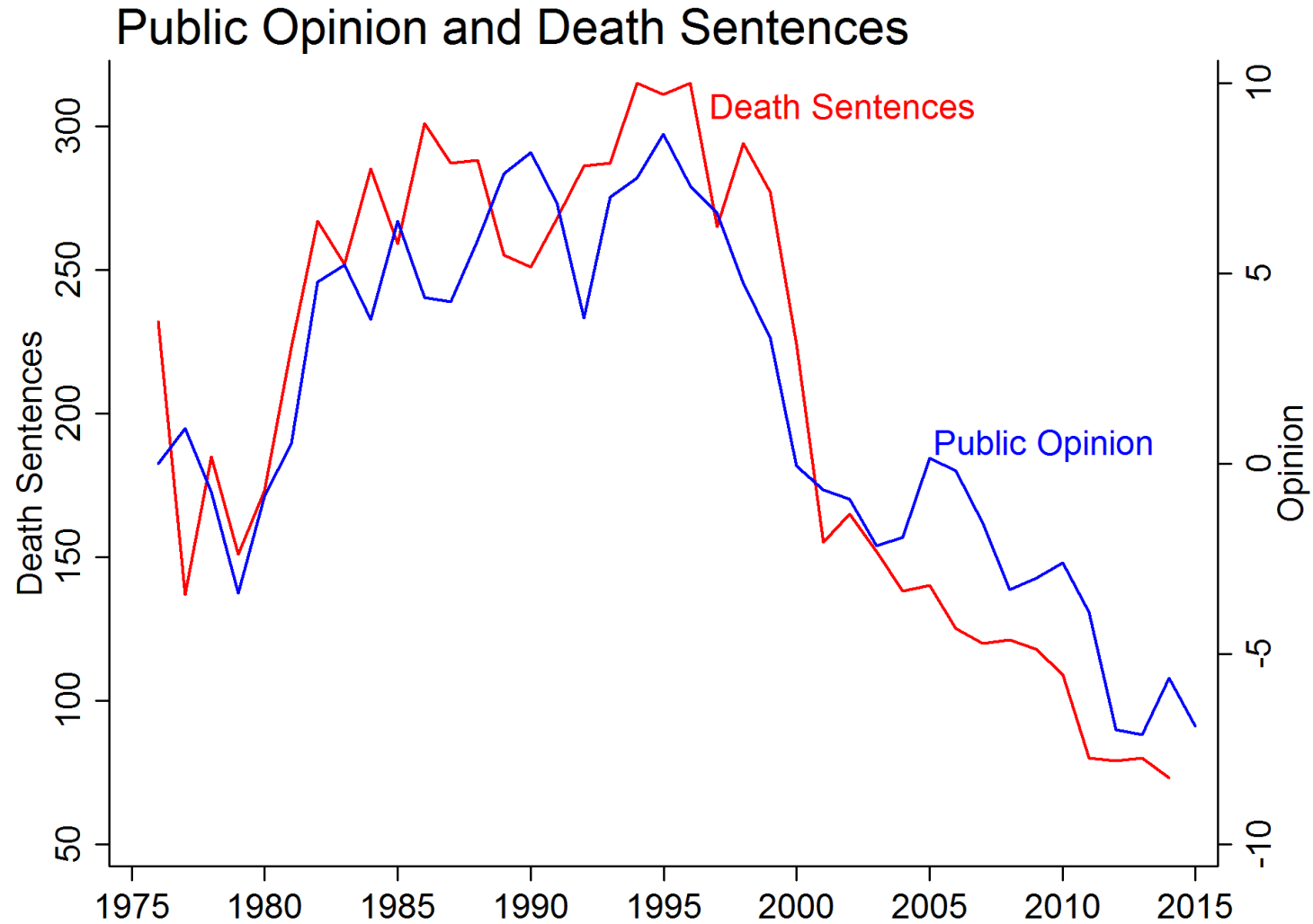
Substantive effect of shift in media tone is greater than the slowly shifting nature of public opinion.

This media effect is not a journalistic bias, but reflects how communities of professionals discuss the policy issue (evidence not shown today).
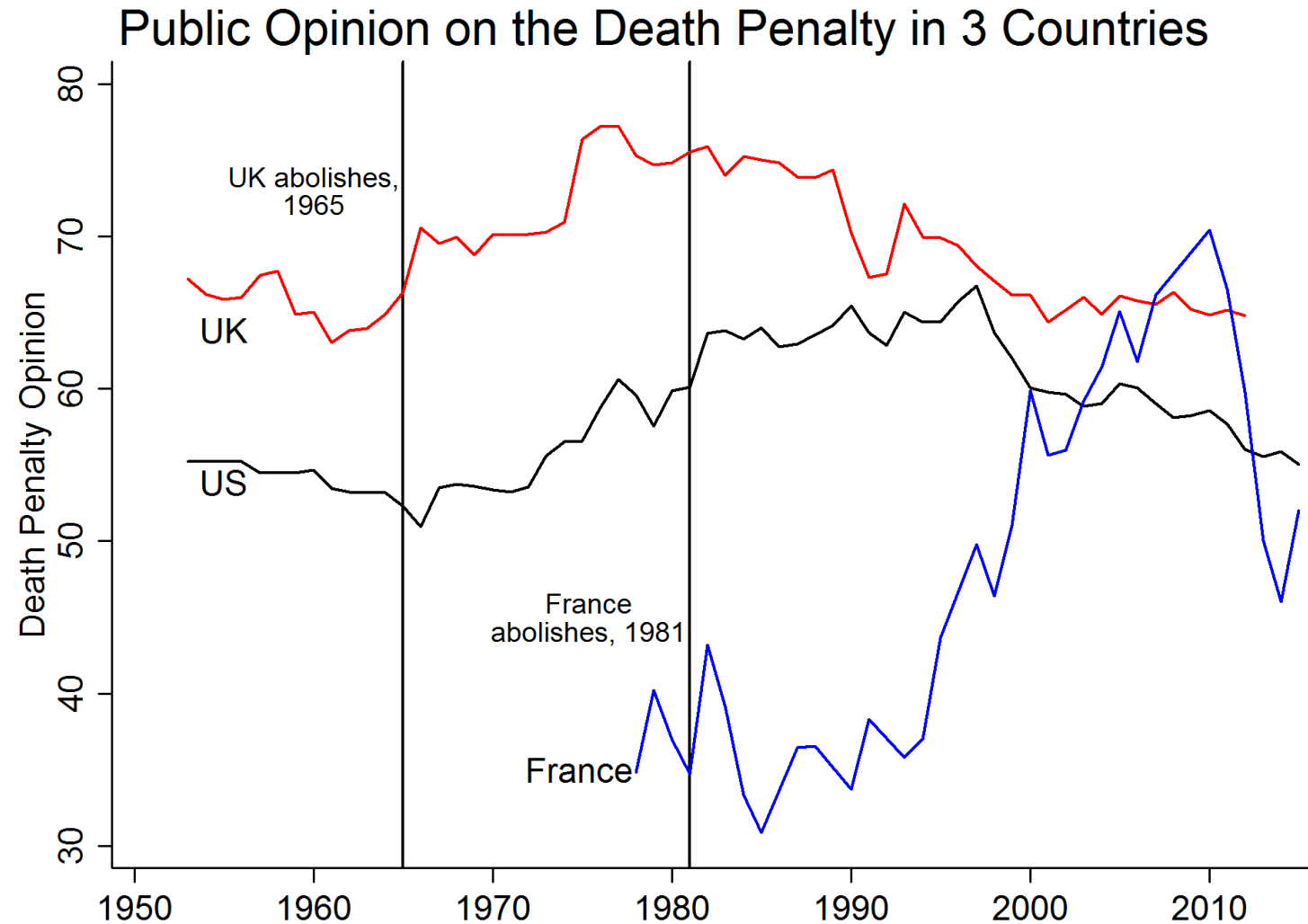
Compare Enn's Study of "Punitiveness" to opinion on the death penalty

Public Opinion on Crime and the Death Penalty

Opinion and Death Sentences

Public Opinion and Death Sentences

Death Penalty Opinion in the US, UK, and France: Public v. Elite Determinants of Public Policy?

Public Opinion on the Death Penalty in 3 Countries

For Wednesday

- Framing must be related to public opinion. Why does opinion shift?

- But elites are also seeking to "lead" by "following" public opinion: they want to be out in front, but not by too much.

- By looking at trends in public opinion, framing, and elite discourse, we can see where public policies are going.

- Re-read the gist of Enns' study on crime. Look at Dogan and Teles with respect to how CONSERVATIVE political leaders have moved on crime. Think about why.

For your term papers

- Think about how the shifts you document may have affected:
- Public opinion
- Elected officials
- The direction of public policy

- But also think in the other direction. How did changes in those factors feed into the frame shifts you document.

- Think about what was driving it? Social movements? Interest Groups? Individual political leaders? General social norms changing? What was the ultimate cause of the shifts you document? What impact did the shifts have?