



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

**POLI 421**  
**Framing Public Policies**  
**M, W 5:00–6:15 pm, Murphey 115**  
**Fall 2019**

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Office hours: M, W 4-5pm, T 2:30-3:30 pm and by appointment

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This class will focus on the process by which policies get framed, or defined in public discussion. Framing is focusing attention on some elements of a complex public problem rather than others. Politicians constantly attempt to frame issues in ways that are advantageous to their side of the debate, and we often refer derisively to this as “spin.” But framing is inevitable. Furthermore, frames sometimes change over time. Smoking was once seen as glamorous and the tobacco industry was held up as one of the most powerful lobbies in American politics. Today you can’t smoke in most public places. The concept of gay marriage was barely discussed in the mass media in 2000, but today it is the law. So the course will focus on something you see around you every day, at least if you read the newspapers and pay attention to politics.

We will begin with a review of a number of theories from political science and psychology about how we frame things, about why some frames are more powerful than others, and about how the brain processes information when it makes us comfortable and secure as compared to when it is unwelcome or challenging to our prior beliefs or expectations. Then, with this background, we will shift attention to applications of these theories in the realm of public policy. We’ll look at some things with which you may be familiar: race, criminal justice, capital punishment. But we’ll also look at some frames that have not (yet?) caught on: Should there be legal protections for ugly people? Should we ban male circumcision (since babies can’t give informed consent)? Should we ban fully autonomous robots in war zones? Should we give advantage to healthy people? These are frames that have not caught on. But then again, gay marriage didn’t catch on until it caught on.

Since framing is politics and politics is about framing, we will be discussing the political and public policy debates occurring during the semester. I will encourage this, but in an atmosphere where we follow some rules: First, we are not collectively in favor or against any particular frame or argument. Here, we want to know what works and why. Second, we will seek to “pull back” from the headlines to understand what is going on, why, and whether it might be effective. So, we’ll put the Science into Political Science. But we’ll stay interested in politics. Similarly, a lot of the frames we discuss may be distasteful, even ugly. So some of the readings will be hard to stomach. But if we want to understand how framing works, we need to understand things like anger, fear, anxiety, group identity, and how these are manipulated.

This course is listed in the catalogue as Social Science (SS), Communication Intensive (CI), Mentored Research (E6), and Research Intensive. Communication intensive courses integrate written work, oral presentation, and processes of revision into the course subject matter in substantive and important ways. Mentored Research is a form of Experiential Education (EE), and this means that you will conduct your own research project under my supervision. These characteristics of our course determine a lot of the assignments. These will therefore involve not

just reading books and articles as you might in another course, but doing your own research project, handling statistical data, developing qualitative and quantitative comparisons, and drafting your final project in parts, getting feedback on them, presenting parts of them orally, and then incorporating feedback for the final project at the end of the semester. If you like this course, you will love grad school, as the course gives a small taste of the research process, which is the focus of grad school. Each day we will discuss a reading selection, but you will also have important work to be doing regularly on the side, throughout the semester. You can't catch up in the last week of the semester if you get behind.

Depending on your approach, you might use media sources such as the *New York Times*, available for a sufficient period to observe change. The minimum acceptable is 25 years, but longer is better. The *New York Times* is available as a searchable database back to the 1850s, so you are welcome to study historical periods if that interests you. Some other excellent resources are ProQuest and Nexis-Uni, available through the UNC library, the Policy Agendas Project (<https://www.comparativeagendas.net/>) which traces government attention, Google N-Gram, which allows you to search google's book collection for any two-word phrase (see <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>), or other sources. Or, you may look at public documents from policy actors from their web sites, public statements, and so on.

In any case, you will need to pay attention to identifying a policy debate very early in the semester, and then checking whether you can use computerized sources and keyword searches to identify the major frames, or whether you can retrieve relevant documents from public sources in order to get the raw materials for your study. You'll need to get started early, and you may need to change your topic if you can't measure the frames accurately or find enough documents to study. Welcome to the world of empirical research! Sometimes great ideas just aren't feasible for reasons you might not predict; great theories often sink on the shoals of facts, evidence, and empirics... Don't let that happen to you after it is too late. Make sure before you decide on your topic that you do some dry runs to make sure you can measure key frames associated with your policy.

This semester, I also want to add a new theme. I have long been interested in a puzzle: How do you counter-argue against someone making a social justice frame? Who's against human rights, for example? Who's against women's pay equality, the rights of children, and so on? Of course, if everyone were really in favor of these things, we would not have need for social movements demanding equality. So, the question for us this semester is: Given massive resistance to social justice frames, what are the arguments of those opposed? How does one argue against social justice?

To this end, I want each of you to work on a project, alone or in a group (as you choose, but I recommend in groups) where you:

- a) identify a social justice movement of your choice, maybe a contemporary one such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, #SayHerName, or right here on campus with the Anti-Silent Sam movement; or maybe a historical movement such as that in favor of marriage equality, women's suffrage, the Equal Rights Amendment (never adopted), or any other movement that interests you, from the US or another country,

- b) give a brief summary of the goals and main arguments of the social movement in question, and
- c) focus your attention on who mobilized against this movement, in favor of the status quo.
  - a. Who mobilized; list the major actors; what was their motivation?
  - b. What were their arguments? Were these directly contradictory to the stated goals of the movement, or were they indirect?
  - c. What arguments were the most effective?
  - d. Explain the outcome by studying the chronology of events and trends in media framing of the movement.
  - e. How successful were OPPONENTS of the social movement in retaining control of the narrative? How did they brand or portray the social justice movement actors?

Your project should involve a review of the history of a social movement with a focus on the frames and narratives presented by the two sides over time. Ideally, you should find a way to identify the words or phrases most commonly used by proponents and opponents, and track their prevalence over time, quantitatively, using key-word searches of media sources. But I want to be clear: you should focus on those opposed to the movement, not the movement itself.

Approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of your attention should be on the opposition, roughly speaking. Thus, you will learn, and we will learn collectively, about the barriers to justice. It's not enough to have just a good slogan. People fight back. Let's get into that dynamic in some detail.

I encourage you to work in groups of 3-5 individuals, but if you are uncomfortable with group work (as I know from experience many are), then you can work alone. This is a semester-long project and should lead to a paper of about 10-12 pages PER PERSON involved in the project. So if you do a project with 3 group members, the paper should be more complete, covering the question in more detail. Note that I will want to see periodic presentations to class about your progress. If you work in a group, you should coordinate your work so that each member of the group is clearly responsible for a particular task. For example, if you are interested in how pro-immigration advocates frame their arguments, and another student is interested in how anti-immigration advocates do the same, you could combine your efforts to do a joint paper. I encourage you to think about this, as you will all learn more by doing coordinated work. But you will each be responsible for your own part of the project, and I will grade you separately.

You have four times in the semester to turn in or present something about your project. First is telling me about your topic; second is a draft of the first sections; third is a more complete draft; fourth is an oral presentation to the class. I will review and comment on your progress based on these draft assignments. Your final paper should then incorporate any feedback. In the end, your term paper will incorporate the feedback you have gotten during the semester. Your term paper will be more complete and will be double-spaced 10 pages per person involved in the project, plus a bibliography, with 1-inch margins, 12-point font. I will give you a template for the paper based on how I write articles for publication.

Finally, let me mention that the topic of this course is the area where I do much of my research. So come to class with questions about how we do it. You may be surprised at how simple it is in some ways, but complicated in others. In any case, you should get a real feel for the process of

political science research in this class. We will pay attention in class discussion not only to the substance of the conclusions that the authors reach about how policies have or have not been reframed over time, but also how they collect their evidence and support their conclusions.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Participation in class discussion, including attendance                  | 10%  |
| Two intermediate term paper progress reports / drafts (2 x 10%)          | 20   |
| Visiting me in office hours as needed to develop a good research project | 15   |
| Presentation in class  | 20   |
| Final paper  | 25   |
| Final exam   | 10   |
| Total  | 100% |

Missed class and late assignments: Missing class more than a few times will certainly affect your participation grade. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Any late papers / progress reports will be accepted but down-graded by 5 points after the class when they are due, then 5 more points each 24 hours including weekends; if you are late with the assignment, email me the paper. If you know ahead of time you will miss an assignment for some good reason, contact me so we may agree on an alternative, without any penalty. Similarly, if you have an illness or a university supported excuse then no penalties will apply. Just stay in touch.

**Books:** There are no required books for purchase. All the readings will be on the class web site.

**Caveat:** I consider the syllabus in a class to be a contract. However, I do reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates (excluding the officially scheduled final examination), when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules.

**Disabilities:** Please let me know in the first two weeks of class if you need any accommodation for a disability. No problem. But don't delay in letting me know.

**Academic Honesty:** Study together but make sure the work you hand in is your own. For all course work, the Honor Code applies; the student's signature on her/his work confirms that the Code rules were respected. Familiarize yourselves with the Code at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/honor-system>. You also need to familiarize yourself with the concept and practice of plagiarism in order to make sure that you avoid it. Plagiarism is defined as deliberate or reckless representation of another's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own without attribution in connection with submission of academic work, whether graded or otherwise. Take the library's tutorial at <http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/plagiarism/> and ask me if you have any questions.

**Effort:** Don't come to class unprepared to participate.

**Computers and cell phones:** Turn off your phones, for sure. Computers are ok if used for note-taking and referring to the articles. I strongly prefer that you bring actual old-fashioned paper copies of the readings and take notes with pen and paper, so that your attention is directed only at the course material, not your social media. If I see anyone on an

irrelevant web site, I'll mark you down a full letter grade in the class, so please do not do that.

## Weekly schedule and discussion topics

### **Part One: Theories of How People Think and How Policies Are Framed**

**Week 1. Aug 21** Introductions and overview of the course

Wednesday: First day of class, Aug 21

**Week 2. Aug 26. Two Theories: Causal Stories, and Target Populations**

Monday: Stone, Deborah A. 1989. Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas. *Political Science Quarterly* 104, 2: 281–300.

Wednesday: Schneider, Anne, and Helen Ingram. 1993. Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy. *American Political Science Review* 87, 2: 334–47.

**Week 3. Sep 2. Some Basic Vocabulary about Framing**

Monday: Happy Labor Day, no class

Wednesday: Chong, Dennis, and James N. Druckman. 2007. Framing Theory. *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, 1: 103–26.

**Week 4. Sep 9. Gaining v. Losing, Misunderstanding Risk, Good news and Bad News**

Monday: Quattrone, George A., and Amos Tversky. 1988. Contrasting Rational and Psychological Analyses of Political Choice. *American Political Science Review* 82, 3: 719–736.

Slovic, Paul. 1987. Perception of Risk. *Science* 236 (4799): 280-85.

Wednesday: Baumeister, Roy F., Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer, and Kathleen D. Vohs. 2001. Bad Is Stronger Than Good. *Review of General Psychology* 5: 323-370.

**Week 5. Sep 16. Anger and Fear; Moving the “Overton Window”**

Monday: Lerner, J.S., and D. Keltner. 2001. Fear, anger, and risk. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, 1: 146–49.

Aizenman, Nurith. 2019. How To Demand A Medical Breakthrough: Lessons From The AIDS Fight. *NPR.org*. February 9.

Wednesday: Robertson, Derek. 2018. How an Obscure Conservative Theory Became the Trump Era’s Go-to Nerd Phrase. *Politico.com*. February 25.

**Note: Your term paper project topic is due to me today in class, September 18. One page describing what you are interested in studying, and whether it is a group or individual project (one page per group). (This assignment will not be graded.)**

**Week 6. Sep 23. Believing What We Want: Motivated Reasoning**

Monday: Lord, Charles G., Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper. 1979. Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37 (11): 2098-2109.

Wednesday: Ditto, Peter H. and David F. Lopez. 1992. Motivated Skepticism: Use of Differential Decision Criteria for Preferred and Nonpreferred Conclusions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63 (4): 568-84.

**Week 7. Sep 30. More on Motivated Reasoning, and an Application**

Monday: Kunda, Ziva. 1990. The Case for Motivated Reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin* 108(3): 480-98.

Wednesday: Eberhardt, Jennifer L., Nilanjana Dasgupta, and Tracy L. Banaszynski. 2003. Believing is Seeing: The Effects of Racial Labels and Implicit Beliefs on Face Perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 29, 3 (March): 360-70.

**Week 8. Oct 7. Episodes v. Themes**

Monday: Aaroe, Lene. 2011. Investigating Frame Strength: The Case of Episodic and Thematic Frames. *Political Communication* 28: 207–26.

**Note: Your first draft is due in class on Mon., Oct 7: Five pages (double-spaced) explaining your theory, literature, and case. The more you give about the research the better, but I don't expect much yet. This should focus on background about the case and possible data sources.**

Wednesday: Baumgartner out of town. A good opportunity to meet with your group and make progress on your project.

**Part Two: Applications to Politics and Public Policy****Week 9. Oct 14. Applications: Brexit, Framing the Poor**

Monday: Segal, David. 2018. In Brexit Vote, Town's Nostalgia for Seafaring Past Muddied Its Future. *New York Times*. 23 April.

Wednesday: Rose, Max, and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2013. Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and US Poverty Policy, 1960–2008. *Policy Studies Journal*, 41, 1: 22–53.

**Week 10. Oct 21. Causal Stories about Race and Disadvantage; “Super-predators”**

Monday: Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo, Amanda Lewis, and David G. Embrick. 2004. I Did Not Get That Job Because of a Black Man...: The Story Lines and Testimonies of Color-Blind Racism. *Sociological Forum* 19, 4 (December): 555-81.

Wednesday: DiIulio, John J., Jr. 1995. The Coming of the Super-Predators. *The Weekly Standard*. 27 Nov.

DiIulio, John J., Jr. 1996. My Black Crime Problem, and Ours. *City Journal* n.p.

**Week 11. Oct 28. Empathy, Hostility, and Capital Punishment**

Monday: Johnson, Sheri Lynn, Amelia Courtney Hritz, Caisa Elizabeth Royer, and John H. Blume. 2016. When Empathy Bites Back: Cautionary Tales from Neuroscience for Capital Sentencing. *Fordham Law Review* 85: 573–598.

Wednesday: Eberhardt, Jennifer L., Paul G. Davies, Valerie J. Purdie-Vaughns, and Sheri Lynn Johnson. 2005/06. Looking Deathworthy: Perceived Stereotypicality of Black Defendants Predicts Capital-Sentencing Outcomes. *Psychological Science* 17, 5: 383-6.

**Note: Your second draft is due in class Wed. Oct 30: It should include improvements to the part I reviewed already, based on my feedback, and also a draft of your data / analysis section. It might have some missing elements, but the structure should be complete.**

**Week 12. Nov 4. “Lookism”: Should we have legal protection for ugly people? Is it Fair to Favor Attractive People? Can obese individuals get into medical school?**

Monday: Warhurst, Chris, Diane van den Broek, Richard Hall, and Dennis Nickson. 2012. Great Expectations: Gender, Looks and Lookism at Work. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* 5, 1:72–90.

Warhurst, Chris, Diane van den Broek, Richard Hall, and Dennis Nickson. 2009. Lookism: The New Frontier of Employment Discrimination? *Journal of Industrial Relations* 51, 1: 131–136.

Wednesday: Maxfield, Charles M., Thorpe, Matthew P., Desser, Terry S., Heitkamp, Darel E., Hull, Nathan C., Johnson, Karen S., Koontz, Nicholas A, Mlady, Gary W., Welch, Timothy J., and Grimm, Lars J. 2019. Bias in Radiology Resident Selection: Do We Discriminate Against the Obese and Unattractive? *Academic Medicine* May 28 Ahead of Print doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000002813

ABC 11. 2019. Obese, unattractive students discriminated against in medical admissions process, Duke study finds. June 5.

**Week 13. Nov 11. Should Freedom from Circumcision Be a Fundamental Human Right?**

Monday: Carpenter, Charli. 2014. “Lost” Causes: *Agenda Vetting in Global Issue Networks and the Shaping of Human Security*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, Ch. 6, “His Body, His Choice”, pp. 122–147.

Wednesday: **We Hate Civilian Deaths of Women and Girls, but not Boys. What the Heck?** Carpenter, R. Charli. 2005. “Women, Children and Other Vulnerable Groups”: Gender, Strategic Frames and the Protection of Civilians as a Transnational Issue. *International Studies Quarterly* 49, 2: 295–334.

**Week 14. Nov 18. Presentations**

Monday: Group A

Wednesday: Group B

**Week 15. Nov 25. Presentations**

Monday: Group C

Wednesday: No class, happy Thanksgiving break.

**Week 16. Dec 2.**

Monday: Summary, catch-up, review, room for presentations if needed.

Wednesday: Last day of class. Review and discussion

**Final Exam: Thursday Dec 12, 8:00-11:00am, room to be assigned by the Registrar**