
POLI 421
Framing Public Policies
M, W 3:35-4:50PM, Murray Hall Room G205
Spring 2023

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This 3-credit hour 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 (at least so far!). 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. Actually, for better or worse, this may be a golden age of spin...

We will begin with a review of a number of theories from political science and psychology about how the brain processes information and how stories, frames, and narratives are generated and affect us. 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, crime, mental illness. 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)? Was a legitimate concern with treating pain at the root of the opioid crisis? Should the police have killer robots? Some of these frames that have not caught on. But then again, gay marriage didn’t catch on until it caught on. In the third and final section of the course, we’ll brainstorm about particular policy issues, seeking to develop new frames or to understand the frames you have previously seen. This last section will be light on the readings as you’ll be busy with your term papers.

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, often in ways that hurt people, unfortunately.

This is a Research and Discovery class. As such, it requires you to develop these skills:

1. Frame a topic, develop an original research question or creative goal, and establish a point of view, creative approach, or hypothesis.
2. Obtain a procedural understanding of how conclusions can be reached in a field and gather appropriate evidence.
3. Evaluate the quality of the arguments and/or evidence in support of the emerging product.
4. Communicate findings in clear and compelling ways.
5. Critique and identify the limits of the conclusions of the project and generate ideas for future work.

The course 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, 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.

Each of you will work on a semester-long research paper tracing the evolution of the frames associated with the public policy question of your choice. You may work alone or in small groups (4 people or fewer). I encourage you to work together because you can do a bigger project as a group; however, I do not require it.

You are free to pick the issue you want to study. In past semesters, students have done interesting projects tracing the history of gay marriage, comparing it to inter-racial marriage, doing projects on educational segregation, nuclear power, smoking and tobacco, climate change, and so on. Currently in the news there is a lot of coverage of certain people accused of crimes: Brittney Griner (in Russia), Steve Bannon, some of the people who attacked the US Capitol building on January 6, 2021; Sam Bankman-Fried, or look up this German criminal: Prince Heinrich XIII of Reuss. An interesting project might be to evaluate the photos that have appeared in the news: are they in handcuffs, looking like the typical "perp" or do they manage their media appearances somehow better than that? Or you might follow up on some of the readings on the syllabus about how crime is often portrayed in the local media by doing your own study of crime statistics versus what appears in the news, in a city of your choice. Another interesting topic for those of you who have had my class on the death penalty is to analyze the news coverage associated with male and female offenders sentenced to death. In sum, you should pick a topic early, talk with me about it, and decide if you want to work alone or in a group.

Depending on your topic, you might use media sources such as the *New York Times* Historical Collection, or other media data collections. 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. Another excellent resource is Nexis-Uni, available through the UNC library (providing access to historical newspaper collections from all around the country); your friendly librarian at Davis Library may also point you to other sources for historical newspaper coverage. Note that doing this project may require you to learn in some detail how properly to work the search engine, to

download the results, and to organize them in a spreadsheet or database. In fact, that's a key element of it. I'll help you, but you have to get an early start. Because change occurs over time, you'll want to study issues over a long period of time, several decades preferably.

Your project may track the history of coverage of your chosen policy issue with a focus on the frames and narratives presented by proponents and opponents of the status quo over time. Ideally, you should find a way to identify the words or phrases most commonly used by the two sides, and track their prevalence over time, quantitatively, using key-word searches of media sources. 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. Pay close attention to BOTH SIDES of the argument, even if you find one side to be obviously incorrect or misled, particularly for historical debates where the winning side is now taken for granted. Or, if you do a current debate such as abortion, be sure you are comfortable objectively analyzing both sides of it, not just one.

Or, your project might be about how journalists typically frame something like crime or how different types of individuals appear in the press; what kinds of photos appear and what those photos tell us. The point is that it needs to be a systematic study based on original research. I'm not really interested in your personal views here, though your personal interests may drive your choice of the topic.

I encourage you to work in groups of 2-4 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. 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 if possible.

You have five times in the semester to turn in something about your project. First is telling me about your topic; second is a draft of the first sections; third is a draft of the data section; fourth is a complete draft; fifth is the final paper. I will review and comment on your progress based on these draft assignments. Your final paper should then incorporate any feedback. Your term paper 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.

Because this research must involve original research, and that may be quantitative, you may need help in doing it. Here's my promise: I'll be your research assistant. Just come to my office hours with your spreadsheets or problems and I'll show you how to move the project to the next level. 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	15%
Statement of research topic, due in week 5	10
Draft background and theory section, due in week 8	10
Draft data description section, due in week 11	10
Draft of complete paper for initial review, due in week 13	10
Final paper incorporating all my comments on previous sections, week 15	30
Final exam	15
Total	100%

Note that each successive paper draft should incorporate the previous draft and your edits based on my feedback. By the time the final paper is handed in, it should therefore be highly polished.

Grading Scale

Converting your final average to a letter grade:

94 or above: A	80 to 82: B-	67 to 69: D+
90 to 93: A-	77 to 79: C+	60 to 67: D
87 to 89: B+	73 to 76: C	Below 60: F
83 to 86: B	70 to 72: C-	

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 (on a 100 point scale) 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. That just makes me feel disappointed in you, and we don't want that! This means, in particular, doing the readings before you come to class. Otherwise you can't really provide meaningful participation.

Covid: If you are sick, please don't come to class. If I get sick, I won't come to class. Hopefully none of this will happen. However, if I get sick but can still teach, I'll make arrangements to teach the class remotely by zoom. If you get sick, please contact me about making up any work, most likely by contacting me by zoom during office hours or at another time. I do not plan to teach the class in a hybrid (in-person as well as with a remote option) because I don't think the remote option promotes high quality learning. So, as long as we can, let's meet in person and hopefully that will be how the semester goes. However, we'll remain flexible and if you get sick, please just let me know.

Weekly Schedule

Part I: Theories and Concepts

Week 1, Jan 9, 11: Introduction

Monday: Introduction, no readings

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

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

Week 2, Jan 16, 18: Causal theories and target populations

Monday: No class, happy MLK, Jr. Day!

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

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, Jan 23, 25: Misunderstanding risk; the equivalence between gains and losses; asymmetries between bad v. good news

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

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

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 4, Jan 30, Feb 1 Anger, fear, and public policy; episodes and themes (stories v. data)

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

Week 5, Feb 6, 8: Motivated reasoning, or refusing to change your mind when you don't like the new evidence

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.

Kunda, Ziva. 1990. The Case for Motivated Reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin* 108, 3: 480–98.

Wednesday: Study day, Baumgartner out of town

Note: Statement of research project due in class Mon Feb 6. Also list of group members, if applicable.

Week 6, Feb 13, 15: The rapidity of policy change, and an example: Poverty

Monday No class, happy Wellness Day!

Wednesday: Baumgartner, Frank R. and Bryan D. Jones. 1991. Agenda Dynamics and Policy Subsystems. *Journal of Politics* 53, 4 (November): 1044–74.

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 7, Feb 20, 22: Social Identity Theory and its implications for in-group solidarity; state responses to Covid, and the health consequences of politics.

Monday: Tajfel, Henri. 1970. Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination. *Scientific American* 223, 5: 96–102.

Branscombe, Nyla. R., Michael T. Schmitt, and Richard D. Harvey. 1999. Perceiving pervasive discrimination among African Americans: Implications for group identification and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 1: 135–149.

Wednesday: Johnson, Akilah. 2022. Can politics kill you? Research says the answer increasingly is yes. *Washington Post*. December 16.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/12/16/politics-health-relationship/>

Krieger, Nancy, Christian Testa, Jarvis T. Chen, William P. Hanage, and Alecia J. McGregor. 2022. Relationship of political ideology of US federal and state elected officials and key COVID pandemic outcomes following vaccine rollout to adults: April 2021–March 2022. *The Lancet Regional Health - Americas* 16 (December): 100384

Montez, Jennifer Karas, Nader Mehri, Shannon M. Monnat, Jason Beckfield, Derek Chapman, Jacob M. Grumbach, Mark D. Hayward, Steven H. Woolf, and Anna Zajacova. 2022.

U.S. state policy contexts and mortality of working-age adults. *PLoS-ONE*.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0275466>

Week 8, Feb 27, Mar 1: The “story lines” of race; asset v. deficit framing

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: Zinnen, Shiori. 2021. From deficit-framing to asset-framing: the power of narrative in working toward equity. June 30. <https://readingpartners.org/blog/from-deficit-framing-to-asset-framing/>

Tippett, Krista. 2022. On Being with Krista Tippett, Trabian Shorters: A Cognitive Skill to Magnify Humanity. <https://onbeing.org/programs/trabian-shorters-a-cognitive-skill-to-magnify-humanity/> (50 minute podcast)

Note: Draft of the background and theory section due in class Wed Mar 1. This should include the historical background and major citations to previous studies of your topic.

Part II: Applications to Current Issues of Public Policy

Week 9, Mar 6, 8: “Crack babies” – a thing that never happened. “Pain as the fifth vital sign” and the Oxycodone explosion, a thing that really did come to pass!

Monday: Kolata, Gina. 1990. Bias Seen Against Pregnant Addicts. *New York Times*. July 20. <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/20/us/bias-seen-against-pregnant-addicts.html>

Sexton, Joe. 1996. Officials Seek Wider Powers to Seize Children in Drug Homes. *New York Times*. March 12. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/12/nyregion/officials-seek-wider-powers-to-seize-children-in-drug-homes.html>

Day, Nancy L., and Gale A Richardson. 1993. Cocaine Use and Crack Babies: Science, the Media, and Miscommunication. *Neurotoxicology and Teratology* 15: 293-294.

Zuckerman, Barry, Deborah A. Frank. 1992. Crack Kids: Not Broken. *Pediatrics* 337-339.

Mayes, Linda C., Richard H. Granger, Marc H. Bornstein, and Barry Zuckerman. 1992. The Problem of Prenatal Cocaine Exposure: A Rush to Judgment. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 256, 3: 406–408.

Wednesday: Campbell, James N. 1996. APS 1995 Presidential Address. *Pain Forum* 5: 85–88.

Morone, Natalia E., and Debra K. Weiner. 2013. Pain as the Fifth Vital Sign: Exposing the Vital Need for Pain Education. *Clinical Therapeutics* 35, 11: 1728–1732.

Watch *DopeSick* on Hulu (optional). Also see this description of it.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/11/08/1051475843/dopesick-hulu-true-story-opioid-addiction>

Spring Break, week of March 11

Week 10, Mar 20, 22: We hate land mines, why not war robots? Killer robots for the police? Is male circumcision a human rights abuse? Says who?

Monday: Carpenter, R. Charli. 2011. Vetting the Advocacy Agenda: Networks, Centrality and the Paradox of Weapons Norms. *International Organization* 65, 1: 69–102.

Duret, Daphne. 2022. What San Francisco’s Killer Robots Debate Tells Us About Policing. The Marshall Project. 10 December. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/12/10/san-francisco-killer-robots-policing-debate>

Wednesday: 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.

Week 11, Mar 27, 29: The invention of the “super-predator” and “moral panic”

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

The Superpredator Scare. *New York Times Retro Report*. April 8, 2014.

Wednesday: Welch, Michael, Eric A. Price, and Nana Yankey. 2002. Moral panic over youth violence: Wilding and the Manufacture of Menace in the Media. *Youth and Society* 34, 1: 3-30.

Note: Draft of the data description section due in class Wed Mar 29. These are your main statistical results, based on your set of keywords. At a minimum, you need to have debugged and verified your set of keywords to find news stories on your topic and the different frames used. At a maximum, you may have already a draft of your results. More is better, but the key is to have the keywords defined and verified.

Part III: Brainstorming and Framing Issues of Public Policy. (Be Ready to Discuss!)

Week 12, Apr 3, 5: Legal protections for unattractive people (“lookism”)? Why are some forms of discrimination illegal but others are not?

Monday: 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.

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* 94, 11 (November): 1774–1780.

ABC 11. 2019. Obese, unattractive students discriminated against in medical admissions process, Duke study finds. June 5. <https://abc11.com/attractiveness-obese-unattractive-fat/5329842/>

Wednesday: Why are some groups “protected” and others are not? Look at these examples and come ready to discuss.

US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: <https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/small-business/3-who-protected-employment-discrimination>

State of California: <https://www.senate.ca.gov/content/protected-classes>

New York City: <https://www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/the-law.page>

UNC at Chapel Hill: <https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/ppdhrm-protected-statuses/>

Week 13, Apr 10, 12. Should government mandate better working conditions? What do we call mandatory labor inside prisons?

Monday: The government mandated the end to child labor, requires certain safety conditions in the workplace, mandates a minimum wage, and so on. Business owners often oppose these intrusions on their autonomy. What are the common frames for and against legal mandates for improved working conditions? Let's discuss some of the current controversies in this area: What should be the minimum wage? How much vacation time should a worker get? What about maternity / paternity leave? What are the most effective frames for and against each of these ideas? (no readings)

Wednesday: Is prison labor slave labor?

Story about a recent referendum in Louisiana:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/11/17/1137398039/louisiana-voters-rejected-an-antislavery-ballot-measure-the-reason-is-complicate>

How that works in North Carolina, an issue no one discusses:

<https://www.ncdps.gov/our-organization/adult-correction/prisons/prison-facilities/roanoke-river-correctional-institution-formerly-caledonia-correctional>

Some more about this history... <http://www.ncmarkers.com/Markers.aspx?MarkerId=E-94>

Note: Initial draft of entire paper due in class Wed Apr 5.

Week 14, Apr 17, 19: Abolish the police, abolish prisons, can we do better with this frame? Who opposes human rights, and what are their arguments?

Monday: Is “abolish the police” or “abolish prisons” the best frame? Come to class with ideas of how to frame police and prison reform. (no readings)

Wednesday: Pick your favorite human rights movement that eventually succeeded. Who was opposed? What were their arguments? What do those arguments have in common, if anything? Is this still happening? What are the top arguments for people opposed to demands for changes to ensure equal justice or equal rights? (no readings)

Week 15, Apr 24, 26: Conclusions

Monday: Summary and open discussion

Wednesday: Review for final exam

Note: Final paper projects due in class Apr 26.

Final exam, Tuesday May 2, 4:00–7:00 pm

(Last updated: January 8, 2023)