Review for Policy Studies Journal
Manuscript ID: PSJ-719-1
Title: Framing the Poor

This paper marks a significant contribution to the literature on media framing and policy responsiveness. The authors make three simple, powerful points. Looking at the last half century, the authors show how 1) media framing has shifted dramatically over time, from depicting poverty as a product of disadvantage to depicting it as a product of laziness; 2) government spending on poverty in relation to the underlying need has dramatically deteriorated; and 3) this decline in government poverty spending is largely attributable to the shift in media framing. While the notion that media framing influences public policy is not new to the literature, this paper takes us an important step forward by applying theories of policy framing to this critical social issue (with several key implications) and, especially, by demonstrating the value of smart, meticulous, well-applied methods in studying framing and policy.

Below, I have listed comments and requests for clarification that I hope the authors will find helpful in making the paper even stronger, especially with regard to the link between media framing and government spending (point #3 above).

Measurement
- So as not to keep your reader wondering about the GGI measurement until pg. 10, on pg. 3 it would help to be more concrete, e.g., "The GGI is the percent of government spending on poverty assistance divided by the extent of the problem (in the form of the poverty gap)."
- If "the poverty rate is generally considered a more revealing indicator" due to shifts in total US population (pg. 10), then why is the poverty gap measure based on the total amount of money it would take to pull the number of poor out of poverty and not, for example, the % of US GDP it would take? Especially given that the numerator in the GGI is % spending, not dollars.
- Speaking of the measure of % government spending, I think it would help to have more explicit discussion about how this measure maps onto the amount of spending (controlling for inflation) conditional on other key policy priorities. Space allowing, it would be nice to see a graph of standardized spending in dollars mapped onto Figure 4 (or before/after it), in parallel with the raw number of poor mapped onto Figures 2 and 3. But regardless, it would help to have more discussion about what other policy demands might have pulled the % of poverty spending up or down in ways that reflect a shift in governmental prioritization but not necessarily a shift in the raw financial commitment to addressing the issue.
- Similarly, I could use more discussion on measuring GGI in terms of percentage of "its" (which?) 1960 value—pg. 13. And it seems Figure 5 should make that operationalization clear.

Causal Argument
- The authors have given us a tour de force with regard to the key variables of government spending and media framing. Yet I think they could go further in developing a stronger causal story—with more prominence in the manuscript—about **A) what forces prompted the documented shifts in media framing** and **B) what causal mechanisms led to the effects of media framing on government spending**. I get that this is asking a lot, especially given space constraints. But in the ideal world, I'd love to see both points A and B addressed.

Factors triggering frame change
- Regarding point A, I think it would add much to our understanding of this issue if the authors could find the room to pin down, qualitatively, a story about what events/political actions/cascade dynamics/etc. likely contributed to the shifts in frames—as Baumgartner and Jones do in the case of smoking and nuclear power, and as Baumgartner et al. do in the case of the death penalty.
- Room allowing, a nod toward the journalistic practices that would reinforce these shifts in frame selection would help round out this story re: point A (e.g., Bennett's indexing theory, Entman's cascade activation model, Iyengar's organizational process discussion).
- However the authors might be able to address point A, if they tackle this challenge I hope they do so with an eye toward the gnawing question of necessary and sufficient conditions for frames (generalizably) to gain traction in the news.

Causal mechanisms
- Regarding point B (but perhaps also point A), all but absent from the authors' discussion is the role of public mood in the effect of media framing on government spending for the poor—a role that may really be central to the causal story here. Do the authors suspect that shifts in media framing produced shifts in public perception, which led in turn to shifts in spending? Or that media framing and public perception of the poor are mutually reinforcing? Or that policymakers responded to media framing exclusively and that public opinion was out of the causal loop entirely? In any case, I think the public deserves more discussion. Ideally, of course, the authors would throw aggregate public opinion about poverty spending into their model. But short of that, it would be nice to hear some discussion, for example including what the authors make of how Stimson's mood index maps onto GGI only in the 1970s through the circa-1980 drop, and doesn't appear to track the Net Generous Frame measure at all.
- Relatedly, I think the authors could push their discussion of social construction even further, thinking in particular about shifting social stigmas somewhere along the causal chain between media framing and government spending. For example, Cox's 1998 "The Consequences of Welfare Reform: How Conceptions of Social Rights are Changing" (*Journal of Social Policy*, 27) might be a good reference. And following up on the other works by Katz the authors reference, Katz' 2008 *The Price of Citizenship* has some helpful discussion along these lines.
- Again, the more this discussion could aim—at least in speculation—toward necessary and sufficient conditions, the more the study will contribute to our understanding of media framing effects as a general phenomenon.

Time Series Model
- The model results are compelling, but their presentation in the text feels like a quick drive by. I think the model needs more discussion if it (along with Figure 8's visual evidence) is to support the weight of the central argument of the paper.
- The authors do a nice job of talking transparently about how they use a ten-year lag because it fits the data best, and no because of any a priori explanation. Still… I think readers are going to need something more to hold onto here; at minimum, a plausible, more concrete story about how in the case of poverty it can/does take a decade for media effects to filter through the policymaking process.
- I expect that general readers would appreciate more conceptual discussion about what other explanatory factors would be nice to control for in future studies. One way to slice the model apart might be to present it a second time, this time modeling the percentage of government spending as a function of Net Generous Frame and also the Poverty Gap measure to demonstrate that media framing served to drive policy (in isolation of the underlying severity) even when controlling for this severity. This approach might be too conceptually (or methodologically) sticky, but something to consider. In any case, some kind of discussion about possible omitted variables seems necessary.
- Time series users will also want to have more information about the analysis, including the following information: confirmation that the series was deemed stationary before embarking on the analysis, that there wasn't enough autocorrelation present to necessitate the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable, and that the model produced white noise residuals.

Final Thought
- This last comment may be beyond the scope of this study, but Figure 7 suggests that it would be interesting to examine—either through manual content analysis down the road or even anecdotally based on the authors' read of the sampled news stories—whether some frames are typically thematically presented (a la Iyengar), whereas others are episodically presented. Similar to Baumgartner et al.'s look at the shift in death penalty coverage from focusing on the victim to focusing on the defendant, I wonder if the underclass frames in particular (but also the disorder and barrier frames too) are frequently delivered in a thematic way, whereas the lazy and cheating frames are probably more commonly delivered episodically. If the authors understanding of the data would support this conclusion even anecdotally, it would add even more traction to the theoretical story.