

“Framing the Poor: Media Coverage and US Poverty Policy, 1960-2008”
MS 61-347

This article attempts to understand public policy aimed at solving problems related to poverty through an analysis of media framing of the poor. A statistical model is presented wherein the generosity of government policy towards to poor is explained by media framing of the population/problem.

Overall comments:

This paper is a very interesting approach to understanding how media frame poverty, the possible policy consequences, and developing an innovative model of framing influence. The most significant problem with the current manuscript is the lack of theoretical grounding of the media framing analysis. There are no clear definitions, method choices, or connections between media and policy outcomes.

Detailed comments:

- 1) Introduction: the authors should include more citations in the introductory section of the paper – it presents as a case study, but there is no supporting evidence currently. The case study is very interesting and well researched, but that research should be supported more thoroughly.
- 2) Measures of the poor: page 4 – there is a lot of redundancy in the writing and similarly, a lot of discussion about what we are about to read. While good to let the reader know what lies ahead, this paper does too much of it early on.
 - a. The authors could more effectively present some of the descriptive data together to reduce length, redundancy, and the use of many tables. This section makes an important point, but it could be done thoroughly with more brevity.
- 3) Government generosity: this section is very clear and helpful to the reader. The Index seems to be an appropriate and interesting way to measure government programs for the poor. Like the previous section, however, editing for length could help improve the focus.
- 4) Media framing: This is the section I believe needs the most improvement. There is no connection drawn or model proposed for how media framing influences policies. Is it through influencing public opinion? Is it through directly influencing policymakers? Perhaps the media framing is due to societal understanding of these problems, which changes over time. There is no discussion of the journalistic processes, values, or trends which would shape frames or how these frames somehow influence policy. While this is certainly not unique to this paper, it is important that any paper focusing on the framing policy nexus attempts to explain why media frames would influence policy. It is certainly not a given that this happens through public opinion pressure. This section lacks any significant theory of media framing effects, instead relying on discussion of framing of subject populations and similar work. While undoubtedly important, especially to this type of work, the theoretical grounding of the media component of this work is troubling in the current version of the manuscript.

- 5) Media selection methods: there needs to be an introduction to detail why the authors chose the newspapers that they did – there needs to be some reasoning behind this. Usually it is circulation or prestige press, but the inclusion of Baltimore and Chicago are not consistent with those typical choices. The authors also need to justify using the NYT Index since it is often argued to be flawed. Also, using liberal/conservative leaning justifications for inclusion of papers is flawed because editorial influence and ideology could easily change over a period of decades. Also, if ideology is assumed to influence frames, then some literature about professional journalism norms and practices is essential because many scholars would disagree with such a statement. Make these choices more clear since they are not consistent with similar studies. Why not NYT, WP, WSJ, LAT? Those would be more typical. If the authors are looking at federal policy, then simply the national newspapers are most important. If the authors are looking at both state and federal, then some other selection criteria should be used. Be clear.
- a. Authors need to explain and justify why their key word search framing analysis is better/worse and why they did it differently than most scholars who do a content analysis.
 - b. There is no discussion of the changing meaning of terms over decades. For example, if I were to use the term ‘global warming’ versus ‘climate change’, it would depend greatly on the decade in which the media coverage appears whether one is the dominant term used, whether one is a politically manipulated term, or whether it has become the accepted term among scholars and politicians. I would imagine similar trends may have occurred in poverty policy – the authors should explain whether considerations such as this were included in their research.
 - c. While the major framing analysis was done with key word searches, the initial frames were determined through systematic reading of articles. Citations need to be included here to support the methods used. Also, intercoder reliability should be included to indicate whether coders agreed on the framing categories developed from the initial dataset. This would help the reader feel more confident in the framing analysis done via key words. As it currently reads, there is not much methodologically to support the assertions made.
- 6) Overall there are far too many tables. The authors should find a way to communicate their findings with more clarity and brevity in the tables and description.