

Project Guide for POLI 495: Framing Public Policies

These projects are designed to be equal in terms of scope and expectation of research.

Project Type One: Look at Single Issue over Time

Step One: Develop Frames

Once you have an issue, use a database such as the New York Times (<http://query.nytimes.com/search/query?srchst=nyt&&srcht=a&srchr=n#top>) or Lexis Nexis (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>) to search for articles related to your topic. After reading a subset of articles, develop different frames that correspond to themes that are common in the articles. Then, decide on specific “key words” for these frames. These key words will be used to search for the prevalence of a particular frame over time. It is important that one includes frames from a variety of perspectives, which in some cases might mean both a positive or negative portrayal of something or could also (in the terminology of Stone) mean frames relating to different causal stories.

An excellent example of the development of frames and corresponding search terms is in Rose and Baumgartner’s 2013 article. As one can observe, the authors developed five frames that corresponded to media portrayal of poverty over time (some positive, some negative). Each of these frames has a number of “key words” that are then used to search for relevant articles. For example, one frame these authors use is “cheating,” which is a negative frame. For this frame, the authors present the following search terms as corresponding to this frame: “chiseler OR cheat OR fraud OR ineligible OR overpayment OR corruption OR audit.”

Step Two: Debug search terms

Once you have decided on the search terms that correspond to your chosen frames, you must go back and test to make sure that the chosen key words produce “true hits.” Take a sample of one hundred articles and code the number of them that are “true hits.” Before moving forward, you must make sure that at least eighty of the stories are “true hits.” In other words, if your topic is nuclear energy, makes sure that at least eighty of the stories are actually about nuclear energy. At this step you should also have a spread sheet like the one in example three, although you won’t have the specific count for each frame yet.

Step Three: Count Occurrences per year of Frame

Once you have debugged the search terms, collect data on the number of times each frame appears each year over the span of at least twenty-five years (although more would be better). Then, enter this data into a spread sheet. An abbreviated example of what this might look like is below.

Year	Frame One	Frame Two	Frame Three
First Year	23	66	134
Second Year	44	65	124
Etc.	101	61	122
Last Year	145	77	100

Step Four: Present Results in Graphs

After determining the prevalence of the frames for each year, create professional looking graphs to represent this data. Microsoft Excel works well for this task.

Step Five: Combine Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis in Paper

Statistical analysis can be used to determine whether or not there is a meaningful difference in the prevalence of frames in two different years (or decades).

Project Type Two: Examine Documents from Different sides of a Debate

Step One: Identify Documents for use

Once you decide on an issue, the first step of this version of the project involves examining documents from different sides of a debate. For example, these documents could include a congressional debate, congressional hearings, press releases, or media stories. Using a subset of these documents, one must develop frames and corresponding keywords that relate to themes throughout the documents. You will want to see how each side “talks about” a particular issue.

Step Two: Debug Coding System

Once again it is important to debug the coding system so that the key words used for searching obtain “true hits.” This project will require a total of 250 documents, but for this step you must go through 100 documents to show that your frames are at least somewhat prevalent throughout. In other words, you must demonstrate that key words relating to a chosen frame capture a “true hit” in a least 80% of the documents you examine. In other words, if you are not picking up your frames in at least eighty of the one hundred documents, you may need to develop new frames or change your keywords.

Step Three: Count Use of Arguments by Actor

Once one has debugged the coding system, one must go through the full sample of at least 250 documents to count the prevalence of frames. You must then hand code this data into Excel.

One should express the occurrence of frames as a percent of total documents examined for that actor while also including the corresponding raw number. For example, if you examined 250 documents for Actor One and Frame One was present in 100 of them, the corresponding percentage would be 40%. (see table below)

Step Four: Present Results in Tables

After determining the prevalence of the frames for each actor, create professional looking tables/figures to represent this data. Microsoft Excel works well for this task. An abbreviated example of what this might look like is below. (Note: You could also choose to do column percentages instead of row percentages.)

Actor	Frame One	Frame Two	Frame Three	Total
Actor One	40% (100 cases)	24% (60 cases)	36% (90 cases)	100% (250 cases)
Actor Two	20% (50 cases)	60% (150 cases)	20% (50 cases)	100% (250 cases)

Step Five: Combine Qualitative and Quantitative in Paper

Statistical analysis can be used to determine whether or not there is a meaningful difference in the prevalence of frames between different actors. One example of a statistical analysis that might be used is a “differences in proportions test.”