

Finding a Frame that Fits: Analyzing and Comparing Rival Framing of American Gun Control Policy in 2013

By Alex Booker

Introduction

- “If men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”
- With this paper, I use political framing theory and apply it to better our understanding of the political debate on gun control legislation in early 2013.
- My research question: ***what are the particular elements of a political action frame for a piece of legislation that can lead to its formation of a positive or negative public opinion of it?***

Introduction, cont.

- Overview of this Presentation
 - Quick Review of Relevant Literature
 - Concepts and Deficiency in the Literature
 - Overview of Research Design
 - Methods, Data, Analysis
 - Contributions

Literature Review

- *What is Framing?*
 - Gamson and Modigliani (1989): a frame is a “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue”
 - Think of framing as the “political spin” of an issue.

Literature Review, cont.

- *Applying Framing Theory to Political Science*
 - With political debates that involve competing ideals, framing is vital in making sure that the actors participating the framing (elites, interest groups, political parties, etc.) can easily condense their rationale in an “easy-to-understand” manner to the average citizen.
 - For the purpose of this research topic, I am interested in the “frames in communication,” specifically “advocacy/issue framing”.
 - Nelson and Oxley (1999, 1041) mention that “issue framing is a basic component of political persuasion campaigns”

Literature Review, cont.

- *Real World Examples of Framing and the Impact of Framing in Politics*
 - A major piece of literature that deals with political framing of gun policy is **Haider-Markel and Joslyn** (2001), in where they test the influence of political issue framing dealing with gun control in the aftermath of the Columbine High School Massacre in 1999.
 - The literature that focuses on real-world examples of framing theory by political actors is vital in helping to explain how groups currently use framing to argue for/against a political agenda.

Core Concepts and Deficiency in the Literature

- Core Concepts
 - Frames allow political actors to showcase and argue for their own viewpoint of a particular issue or topic.
 - They typically come from the elites and then trickle down to individuals.
- Deficiency
 - A lack of focus on how the political advocacy frames may play a role in Congressional topics (for exception, see Gerrity's 2006).
 - Not much literature that focuses on successful versus un-successful framing of a political issue, specifically a qualitative method of looking at different elements of a political frame.

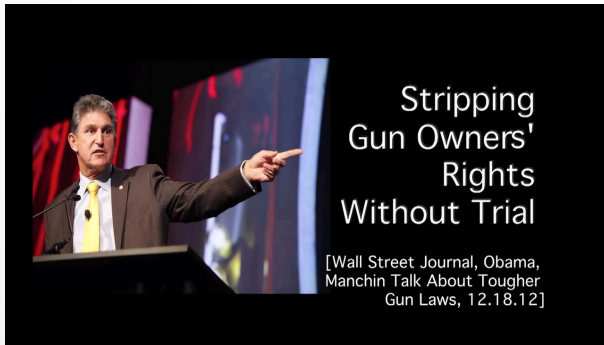
Research Question

- *What are the particular elements, such as socially-centric or emotionally-tied elements, of a political action frame for a piece of legislation, such as the Manchin-Toomey Background Checks Bill, that can lead to its success or failure within the domain of public opinion?*
 - Gun Control debate within the U.S. Congress during early 2013.

Research Design

- I used a mixed-method research design.
 - Content-Analysis (YouTube, Websites, Newspapers)
 - Quant. Experiment (Seaver College Students)
- This paper's main hypothesis is that ***there are particular elements of a political advocacy frame which better resonate with individuals, and thus in turn could potentially play a role in its legislative success.***
- This research design works to find which certain elements of political action frames are used and then what “connects” with individuals.

Content Analysis – Video & Web Findings



- Elites
 - Pro-gun control content mentioned “elites’ in a typically positive or neutral fashion, used to promote the policy.
 - Major difference was that the anti-gun groups treated “elites” in a universally negative fashion, were used to show why the policy was bad.

Content Analysis – Video & Web Findings



- Families and/or Loved Ones
 - Pro-gun control content I looked at used mentions of “loved ones”.
 - A very small minority of anti-gun control content used that type of terminology in their media content.

Content Analysis – Video & Web Findings

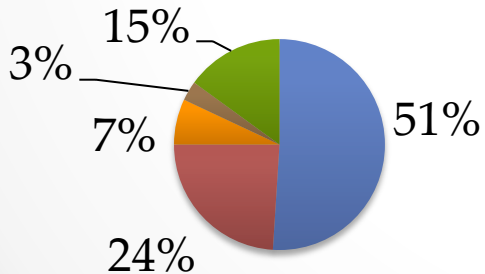


- Past Gun Tragedies/
Victim-Sympathy
 - Pro-gun control groups make note of past gun tragedies, such as the 2012 Newtown shooting and the 1999 Columbine shooting
 - I could not find any anti-gun control groups content that had any mention of past events of gun violence.

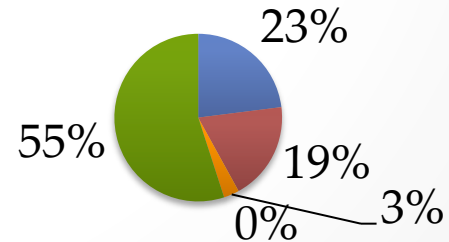
Content Analysis –Newspaper Findings

- The National Rifle Association was mentioned more than other groups in both general mentions, and in number of quotes in articles.
- This could show that the NRA is still thought of as a major interest groups within the news media.

Percentage of Mentions



Percentage of Quotes



Quantitative Experiment Overview

- The basis for my experiment comes from the study done by Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2001).
- The sample consisted of 224 students taking the Pepperdine University-Seaver College's Political Science 104 GE courses in the Spring 2014 semester.
- However, I created four different versions of the questionnaire, with each version containing a different "framing" of the proposal.
 - Victims, Gun Safety, Second Amendment, Control Group
 - My mean score is made from a 1-6 scale = "1" is strongly be against, and "6" is strongly agree for it.

Quantitative Experiment Data

<i>Frames:</i>	<i>Gun Safety</i>	<i>Second-Amendment</i>	<i>Loved-Ones/ Victim Sympathy</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Average Mean of Support:	5.09 (n=61)	4.63 (n=52)	4.83 (n=54)	5.19 (n=57)

- Across all frames, there was support for the expanded background check policy measure, no matter the frame that was presented to the test subjects.

Quantitative Experiment Data

<i>Frames:</i>	<i>P-Value</i>	<i>T-Ratio</i>
Gun Safety	0.308	-0.500
Victim-Sympathy/ Loved-Ones	0.932	-1.506
Second Amendment	0.007	-2.4847

- After conducting a Two-Sample t-test to compare the mean differences compared to neutral frame, only the Second Amendment frame was found to be statistically significant.

Quantitative Experiment Data

Two-Sample t-test – Gender differences compared to neutral frame

<i>frames</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>t-ratio</i>	<i>mean score</i>	<i>Neutral Frame mean score</i>
Second Amendment frame - male	0.006	-2.6006	4.09	5.03
Second Amendment frame - female	0.11	1.2039	5	5.32

- I looked to see if gender plays a role in the accepting of framing arguments. The only meaningful statistically significant differences were when comparing the Second Amendment frame.

Quantitative Experiment Data

Two-Sample t-test – Ideological differences with Second Amendment Frame

<i>Ideology</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>t-ratio</i>	<i>mean score</i>	<i>Neutral Frame mean score</i>
Liberal	0.025	2.001	4.923	5.481
Conservative	0.043	1.739	4.346	4.933

- In addition, I looked to see if one's political ideology had an effect on acceptance of a particular frame.
- There was a statistically significant difference when testing the Second-Amendment negative frames.

Quantitative Experiment Analysis

- Even with the different frames, we can see that there was major support for the policy as presented to the experiment participants.
- It seems that the data supports the ideas that the negative framing (Second Amendment) of a policy can play a small role in effecting public opinion of the proposed policy.

Contributions

- New Frames
 - The victim-sympathy & family-loved ones frames for the promotion of pro-gun control policies
 - The anti-elite frame for the use of arguing against any gun control policies
- Been able confirm, update, and expand the Haider-Markel and Joslyn study.
 - By using university students as my sample, I now have some empirical research on the general opinion of American gun policy among young adults.
- Further research still needed
 - Test anti-elite frame in a quantitative fashion.
 - Test with a much larger and diverse sample population
 - Test how these frames created by political elites, exclusively political interest groups, can influence other political elites with policy power.