Why do Policy Frames Change? Actor-Idea Coevolution in Debates over Welfare Reform

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One shortcoming in the literature on policy framing has been the absence of analytic models through which to explicate change. This paper advances research in this area in three related ways. First, it links policy frames to the actors who employ them. Second, based upon this linkage it proposes two complementary approaches for examining longitudinal change in policy framing: an actor representation approach and a frame adoption approach. Third, it assesses the relative contribution of each process using demographic decomposition analysis. This analytic framework is illustrated using the case of debates over welfare reform in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. The findings are consistent with expectations from the frame adoption approach, suggesting that ideational diffusion was largely responsible for changing discourse during this period.

How do the terms of debate in public discourse become established? How do they change? The answers to these questions bear on a long line of inquiry into the role of ideas in politics, the definition of social problems and their solutions, and the nature of political influence and power (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Edelman 1964; Lukes 1974; Schattschneider 1960). Recently, some of the most fruitful work pertaining to these questions has examined how policy issues are framed in the media. Media discourse constitutes a primary source of "common knowledge" available to average citizens on policy issues and it can exert a substantial influence on citizens' political preferences (Gamson 1992; Neuman et al. 1992; Zaller 1992). The objective of this article is to advance research on political discourse by outlining a conceptual and methodological approach to examining longitudinal change in policy framing. I illustrate this framework by using the case of debates over welfare reform in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

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Policy framing occurs within a discursive field (Wuthnow 1989). This discursive field establishes the limits of policy discourse by defining the range of relevant problems to be addressed and by providing the fundamental categories that shape decision making. Therefore studies of change in policy framing need to examine the ecology of competing frames within this field. Drawing together scholarship in the framing literature as well as in political sociology and the sociology of knowledge, I propose that explanations of such changes can be oriented by two analytically distinct frameworks. The first, an *actor representation* approach, focuses on the changing distribution of actors given voice in policy debates. The second, a *frame adoption* approach, focuses on the changing distribution of frames that actors attach to a policy. While analysts typically focus on one process or the other for theoretical and methodological reasons, the two processes can occur contemporaneously. This suggests the value of looking at the *coevolution* of actors and ideas in a discursive field, a process comprised of two analytically and empirically separable mechanisms of change.

I assess the relative contribution of these two processes using decomposition analysis, a method commonly used in demography to partition the independent contribution of two or more variables on demographic rates such as death rates (Preston et al. 2000). Decomposition analysis is a straight-forward way in which to evaluate the coevolution of actors and ideas and their relative impact on policy framing, but it requires linking policy frames to the actors who use them. Somewhat surprisingly, most existing studies of framing do not link frames to their sponsors, thereby presenting an oddly disembodied picture of policy framing processes. After this link is made, however, decomposition analysis promises to be a fruitful means through which to specify the processes underlying changes in public discourse.

Using media data from the *New York Times*, I examine these processes by analyzing public discourse on welfare reform. The specific policy debate was the fight over guaranteed annual income proposals, which were the primary welfare reform strategy in the United States between the late 1960s and the late 1970s. Experts within President Lyndon Johnson's administration developed these proposals. By 1968, they had risen to national prominence and subsequently became the centerpiece of welfare reform legislation in both Richard Nixon's and Jimmy Carter's administrations. Debate over these policies is particularly well suited for longitudinal frame analysis because the terms of debate on welfare reform were diverse and unsettled in the mid-1960s. Was welfare reform about decreasing poverty or decreasing government spending? Was it about changing the economic system or changing the work behavior of the poor? Yet by the late 1970s, the debate had crystallized around fiscal and work-

related discourse. Due to the fact that guaranteed income proposals were unprecedented and arose during a period of tumult and uncertainty, the debate they engendered also included a wide variety of actors. Therefore the changing patterns in policy framing can be examined in relation to the changing population of actors given voice in media accounts. Because the rise and fall of guaranteed income policies took place during a relatively limited period of time, it was possible to collect the *population* of articles written about them in the *New York Times*.

Policy Framing in the Media

Studies of policy framing in the media began in earnest in the late 1980s and the touchstone for subsequent research has been work by Gamson and his collaborators (Gamson 1992; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gamson et al. 1992). Drawing conceptually from Gitlin's (1980) analysis of media framing and the "New Left," Gamson and Modigliani demonstrated that there are competing ways to interpret social issues and contended that a major dimension of political struggle involves the "symbolic contest over which interpretations will prevail." (Gamson and Modigliani 1989:2) Gamson and colleagues empirically examined how policy issues such as nuclear energy and affirmative action were framed in "interpretive packages" comprising a central organizing idea – the frame – along with metaphors, catchphrases and representations. These interpretative packages condense the potentially multifaceted meaning of a policy issue into a more unidimensional conceptual framework.[1]

Notably, a frame in this view can contain a range of positions on an issue. People can share a frame while holding different substantive policy preferences. As Gamson and Modigliani pointed out, "not every disagreement is a frame disagreement; differences between (say) Republicans and Democrats or 'liberals' and 'conservatives' on many issues may reflect a shared frame." (Gamson and Modigliani 1989:4) Subsequent work bears this out. Gamson (1992) observed that policy debates often take the form of conflicts between themes and counter-themes that share an overarching framing device. For example, he found that debates over affirmative action, both in the media and in small group settings, are often framed in terms of opportunity, but that a common source of disagreement concerns whether equal opportunity already exists or whether affirmative action is required to bring about equal opportunity. Similarly, Lakoff (2004) observed that recent debates over taxation between conservatives and liberals share a "tax relief" frame and that disagreement is over the magnitude and target of tax reductions.

As this discussion suggests, the main influence of policy framing is cognitive. Frames structure a person's attention by promoting particular

definitions of problems, diagnosing the causes underlying those problems, or identifying and justifying potential remedies (Entman 1993). Lakoff (2004), for example, contended that liberals do themselves a disservice by using the language of "tax relief" because using the word "relief" diagnoses taxation as a burden from which the American public needs be to relieved rather than defining it as a civic duty that is necessary to fund valued governmental services. Experimental studies on cognitive schemata have illuminated how frames work in this way (see DiMaggio 1997) and also why they matter for practical issues such as public policy. Iyengar (1990) found that attitudes toward government spending for the poor vary depending on whether poverty is framed as having an individual or societal cause. In reviewing recent research on framing and political attitudes, Kinder summed up by saying that "public opinion does seem to depend in a systematic and intelligible way on how issues are framed…Invoking alternative frames produces alterations in opinion." (Kinder 1998:172-73)

Because media frames contribute to the common knowledge through which citizens "come to understand the world beyond their immediate lifespace," (Neuman et al. 1992:xv) tracking changes in media discourse on policy issues can help us map out the public meanings associated with an issue and how these associations evolve over time (Altheide 2002; Misra et al. 2003). Such an approach is part of a broader movement that seeks to understand shifts in meaning through the formal analysis of textual data (Mohr 1998). Yet despite the potential payoffs of examining change in policy framing, research in this area has been hampered by two related shortcomings.

First, at the theoretical level, there are few frameworks that seek to explicate change in policy framing. Studies of policy frames more typically seek to account for variation across contexts, such as between nation-states or social groups (e.g., Benson and Saguy 2005; Binder 1993), rather than variation over time. Among the few systematic studies of longitudinal frame change, some research shows correlations between frame change and public opinion, but does not make claims about causal direction (e.g., Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Other studies treat frame change as an independent variable to explain shifts in mass opinion (Kellstedt 2000). The upshot is that existing studies of framing, even if they examine longitudinal change, lack attention to the dynamics that help explain the process through which frames enter and exit the field of public discourse.

Two recent studies are illustrative. In Misra et al.'s (2003) examination of changing discourse on welfare policy in 20th century America, the authors found that variation in the racial and gendered depictions of welfare recipients predicted use of a "dependency" frame in welfare discourse. Fiss and Hirsch (2005) examined the diffusion of a "globalization" frame in news stories between 1985 and 1998. They found that changing structural

patterns – such as increasing U.S.-global economic integration – helps account for patterns in the spread of media stories using this frame. Notably, however, both of these studies examined patterns in the usage of a single frame (dependency and globalization, respectively). Neither study tried to account for the outcome of competition *between* frames within a discursive field.

A second shortcoming is methodological. Few existing studies link frames with the actors who sponsor them, thus presenting an oddly disembodied picture of framing processes. As Ferree and Merrill have suggested, only by making this link can studies develop a "more complex model of how people organize, use, and change their frames." (Ferree and Merrill 2000:456) Important work along these lines has recently been advanced by Ferree et al. (2002). Their research examined the frames used in media coverage of debates over abortion in the United States and Germany over a roughly 30-year period. Though the authors did not develop a model of frame change, they did provide an exemplary methodological model for examining policy frames in conjunction with the speakers who use them. Their main analytic interest in the speaker-frame connection was to match patterns in their data with different traditions of normative democratic theory, namely by examining which social groups were represented in the media as important and legitimate voices on the abortion issue. Thus while the authors showed changes in policy framing of abortion over time, they were not centrally interested in explaining them.

Modeling Changes in Policy Framing

Connecting policy frames and their sponsors, as Ferree et al. (2002) have done, provides potential leverage for explaining changes within discursive fields in empirically tractable and theoretically informed ways. After the role of actors is explicitly taken in to account, two different social processes that contribute to longitudinal change in policy framing can be distinguished. Analyses of change oriented by these processes cross-cut a number of schools of thought within political sociology and media studies.

The first is an *actor representation* approach that examines the composition of actors who are covered in media accounts of policy debates. Though not yet prevalent in studies of policy framing, this perspective is well represented in broader work on the relationship between ideas and political participation. In the literature on democracy, for instance, actor representation is the basic mechanism underlying Schattschneider's (1960) classic work on issue expansion. According to his view, controlling the scope of actors involved in political deliberation is central in determining political outcomes, because different actors construct the meaning of policies in different ways – for example, by bringing different standards of

evaluation and substantive concerns into policy debates. The key insight here is that an important dimension of power is the ability to lock political competitors out of the process of deliberation (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). Baumgartner and Jones draw upon this line of reasoning to explain the emergence and subsequent crystallization of a policy's "image," which is the "public understanding of policy problems." (Baumgartner and Jones 1993:25) They argue that a dominant policy image emerges from amid competing, alternative images once a group of elites creates a "policy monopoly," that is, after a stable set of actors establishes jurisdiction over a given issue. From a distinct but consonant theoretical perspective, scholars oriented by Gramscian notions of hegemony expect this type of exclusionary process to be the operative mechanism of change in media framing as well (Gitlin 1980; Herman and Chomsky 1988).

An assumption underpinning this actor-centered approach is that different categories of actors will use different framing strategies based on their varying interests, cultural resources and modes of evaluation. Only on the basis of this assumption would it make sense to claim that differences in the composition of actors would affect the distribution and prominence of competing frames. One important dimension of difference that the literature points to is discourse dominated by "official sources" as opposed to discourse that originates in civil society (Entman and Rojecki 1993; Herman and Chomsky 1988). According to this perspective, journalistic reporting relies heavily on high-level officials within government and corporate communities. Coverage restricted to this narrow range of actors provides only a limited picture of the matters at stake in policy debates and tends to reinforce the status quo. Journalists' professional ideology further militates against using frames sponsored by civic actors because of ambivalence toward mass participation in the political process (Entman and Rojecki 1993; Gitlin 1980). A substantial strand of research on media coverage bears out these views (see Kollmeyer 2004). This does not mean, of course, that all government officials hold the same substantive positions on issues. Yet it does suggest that they share a common set of preconceptions and priorities (e.g., concerns by most all members of Congress over cost containment), which are reflected in the shared frames they employ in the media. Thus while different officials will hold varying substantive policy positions, the "official sources" argument suggests that these disagreements will occur within a limited set of frames that differ from those employed by actors outside this sphere.

The second approach focuses on *frame adoption* and presumes that actors may employ a variety of frames over the course of a debate. From this perspective, the distribution of policy frames can change even while the population of frame sponsors in the debate remains largely the same. This process is consonant with a variety of theoretical perspectives. In

Kingdon's (1984) influential formulation of agenda setting, the emergence of shared policy ideas occurs through diffusion in policy networks. He describes the longitudinal development of ideational consensus across different categories of actors as resulting from "ideas, not pressure" and through "persuasion and diffusion." (Kingdon 1984:131,148) From a related "social learning" perspective, policy elites change the way they frame problems in light of past decisions, new information, or in response to exogenous events (Hall 1993). In media studies that examine the resonance between frames and their audience, actors are seen as seeking (often through trial and error) frames that align with the changing discursive opportunity structure of a policy issue (Ferree 2003; Koopmans and Olzak 2004). My use of the term "frame adoption" is meant to convey that the operative mechanism shared by these different perspectives is variation in the use of available frames by collective actors without making unwarranted assumptions about why actors utilize particular frames. The term is also direction-neutral, encompassing cases both in which frames *wane* in usage and in which they *diffuse* across a population of actors.

Often these actor- and idea-centered approaches are pitched as competing, but they can also be seen as working in tandem with one another, in which case the dominant imagery of the two processes is one of coevolution. Skrentny argues that policy meanings can change either through the activities of "meaning entrepreneurs" or through rapid diffusion during moments of "cognitive liberation." (Skrentny 2002:11) Misra et al. (2002) outline two different ways to think about shifts in framing, one focusing on the changing cultural context of debates in which policy frames can resonate, the other focusing on the power of privileged groups to mobilize resources and embed their frames in the dominant discourse. And Ferree (2003) makes the most explicit reference to a potentially coevolutionary relationship between these two basic processes. She argues that "excluding [policy] ideas has consequences for group inclusion, just as excluding groups limits the range of ideas that are expressed" in deliberation (Ferree 2003:339). Ferree argues in favor of analytically distinguishing between the representation of certain sorts of speakers and the frames in actors' repertoires. It is precisely this *analytic* distinction between speakers and frames that the decomposition analysis utilized in this study operationalizes *empirically*.

The Case of Guaranteed Annual Income

I examine the dynamics of policy framing in the debate over guaranteed income proposals for reforming the American welfare system in the 1960s and 1970s.[2] The central feature of these policies was the provision of a nationally uniform, minimum annual income for the nation's citizens. The

economist Milton Friedman proposed one of the first detailed plans for these policies – in the form of a negative income tax – in 1962 and they began to be considered seriously by policymakers and elites from across the political spectrum during the Johnson administration. In 1969, Nixon proposed a guaranteed income plan called the Family Assistance Plan which passed the full House of Representatives by large majorities in both 1970 and 1971. Nixon's plan was widely expected to pass in the more liberal Senate, but the legislation stalled in congressional committees on both occasions. The Carter administration proposed its own version of guaranteed income legislation, the Program for Better Jobs and Income, but it fared more poorly in Congress and never received a floor vote. Had either of these versions of guaranteed income policy become law, they would have restructured the foundation of America's welfare state both in principle and practice. Since their demise under Carter, the proposals have virtually vanished from the political scene.

Three features of the debate over guaranteed income proposals make them attractive for examining policy framing processes. First, the debate over guaranteed income policies was characterized by a proliferation of different types of frames. Because guaranteed income policies arose on the national agenda during a time of considerable societal upheaval, proponents in the 1960s viewed them as the solution for a host of wide-ranging problems, including unemployment due to industrial automation, inefficient bureaucratic structures, urban migration, family instability, inadequate government benefit levels, social disruption in inner cities, the lack of national welfare standards, perverse work incentive structures, fiscal crises in big cities, invasive social monitoring of welfare recipients, and, of course, the perception that too many people lived in poverty in the wealthiest nation in history. Second, the shape of the debates changed considerably over the time period. In the mid-1960s, none of the frames used to characterize guaranteed income policies dominated public discourse. Contemporaneous observers described the debates during this period as "ideological anarchy." (Burke and Burke 1974:130) Yet by the end of the Carter years, frames emphasizing the fiscal dimensions of the programs and the work behavior of the poor clearly crowded out other types of frames. In other words, the dominant image of guaranteed income policies crystallized during this period. Accordingly, the debate over guaranteed income policy provides a good illustration of the ecology of frame competition. Third, in large part because the policies were unprecedented, a wide variety of collective actors participated in the debates. This complex mix of actors provides analytic room for examining frame change as a potential function of the changing distribution of actors given voice on the policies. In sum, the debate over guaranteed income policy provides a strategic research site in which to examine the evolution

of a policy's dominant framing as a function of the changing distribution of frames employed by actors and the changing distribution of the actors covered in the media.

Data and Methods

The data for this study come from news stories that appeared in the *New York Times*. Previous studies have used the *New York Times* as a media data source because of its status as the "national newspaper of record" – particularly during the time period in question (e.g., Gitlin 1980; McAdam 1982) – and thus its central place in the construction of the nation's "common knowledge." Following the strategy of other published work using the paper, articles about guaranteed income policy were located using the *New York Times Index*, an annual reader's guide that contains brief descriptions of all the articles from the paper pertaining to a given subject. Under the subject heading "Welfare-US," I read through each of the article abstracts listed between 1964 and 1980 and selected any article that might mention guaranteed income policies in any regard, a process that yielded 984 articles. After reading through the full text of these articles, I determined that 701 of them mentioned guaranteed income policies in a substantively meaningful way (which for practical purposes was defined as a reference to guaranteed income policies more extensive than one sentence). Drawing from this population of 701 articles, analysis was restricted to regular news stories– not opinion pieces, editorials, or transcripts – which total 390 articles over the time period.[3]

Based on distinctions drawn by a number of authors (e.g., Cress and Snow 2000; Entman 1993), I identified frames in the news accounts based upon the three main functions they perform in relation to public policy: diagnosing social problems, prescribing solutions, and linking policy options to social values. Each of these three functions can be linked to a substantive frame. For example, statements organized around a frame that emphasizes work could link guaranteed income plans to perverse work incentives in existing anti-poverty programs (problem), argue that the plans would strengthen work requirements (solution), or uphold the virtues of the work ethic (social value). With these three framing functions in mind, I conducted a pilot study using 75 articles. Based on the results of the pilot, I derived eight "frame packages" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989) in which guaranteed income policies were linked to a central organizing idea. These eight organizing ideas were Systemic Reform, Fiscal Management, Work, Poverty, Social Relations, Family, Economy and Values. (See the Appendix for a list of the common subsidiary themes that each frame package comprised.)

Using these preliminary findings as guidelines for a coding sheet, a team of research assistants and I coded the articles in random order for

the frames they contained, a process that yielded 820 instances of policy framing. These frames – or more specifically, frame instances – are the unit of analysis, not the article in which they appeared.[4] A frame instance is the use of one of the eight organizing principles by a particular actor – in other words, a specific frame-actor linkage. The choice to use the frame instance, rather than the article, as the unit was based on two rationales. First, the findings from the pilot study showed that articles often contained multiple complementary or competing frames, indicating that it would misrepresent reality to describe an article as containing a single "dominant" frame, as is often the case in existing studies (e.g., Kellstedt 2000). Second, this proved to be the most straight-forward way of manipulating a data set in which the frame-actor linkage was the central analytic interest.

Following Ferree et al. (2002), frames were treated as part of the broader utterances made by speakers in a news story. Utterances from a unique speaker could contain multiple substantive frames (e.g., Work and Systemic Reform), each of which was coded once per story. If the same frame was used by three separate speakers in a story, each one was coded, since each constitutes a different frame-actor linkage. Actors were grouped into one of five categories based upon their social location: members of Congress, members of the presidential administration, the president himself, state or local politicians, and actors in civil society (mainly consisting of academics and representatives from business, labor, civic and religious organizations).

I examined change over time by dividing the time span into four periods that correspond to episodes of deliberation over guaranteed income plans. The plans were not mentioned in the *New York Times* before 1966 and did not become part of a concrete legislative proposal until Nixon announced his guaranteed income plan on Aug. 8, 1969, so Period 1 begins in January 1966 and runs through Nixon's announcement, thereby covering the pre-legislative discussions of guaranteed income plans. Period 2 covers debates over Nixon's first Family Assistance Plan, which ran through December 1970. Period 3 covers the debate over the second, revised Family Assistance Plan in a new congressional session, from January 1971 through December 1972. Period 4 covers the debate about Carter's Program for Better Jobs and Income, from January 1977 through December 1980.[5] For Periods 1 through 4, the number of frame instances in each period, respectively, was 153, 309, 226 and 132.

I used decomposition analysis to assess the relative contribution of the two explanatory perspectives on changes in policy framing across these four periods. Demographers employ decomposition analysis to partition the influence of two or more variables on a demographic rate.[6] The applicability of decomposition analysis to non-demographic data is

typically limited because sociological data is often based on probability sampling rather than population data. Because the analysis used here is based on the population of frames that appeared in the *New York Times* (though this population is itself a purposive sample of media coverage more generally), decomposition analysis is well suited to explicating the changing rates of policy framing because of its parsimony and expositional clarity.

Each frame has a rate, which is the use of the frame during each period as a proportion of the total number of frame instances in that period. For example, if there were 25 instances of the Poverty frame being used during a period in which there were 200 total frame instances, the rate for the Poverty frame would be .125. For each frame, the analysis decomposes the change in rates between two periods according to two components: actor representation and frame adoption. The *actor representation* component is the representation of each group's framing instances in the media as a proportion of the overall number of framing instances by all the groups during the period. This factor measures a group's standing in the media relative to other groups. The *frame adoption* component is the use of a specific frame by a group as a proportion of the overall number of framing instances by the group. This factor measures the rate at which a group uses a particular frame relative to other frames. The joint contribution of these two factors completely accounts for the changing prevalence of a policy frame between two periods. In other words, the sum of the contribution of the two factors will always be 100 percent. If both factors contribute in the same direction, the contribution of both factors to the change will be positive. Importantly, however, if the two factors work in opposite directions, then one of the factors will account for more than 100 percent of the difference, with the other accounting for a negative percent of the difference. As Preston and his colleagues state, "there is no reason to expect that they will normally work in concert." (Preston et al. 2000:29) For cases in which the two components have different signs, the interpretation is that the magnitude of the substantive frame change would have even been greater were it not for the component that accounts for the negative percent of change.

Results

Each of the eight frame packages was part of the public discourse on guaranteed income policy during the entire period, but as Table 1 shows, there was considerable variation in usage across frames. The Fiscal frame was by far the most prevalent, comprising 26 percent of the total framing discourse. Frames centering around Work, Systemic Reform and Poverty were also prevalent, being employed in 19, 16 and 13 percent of the

Table 1: Frame Frequencies

Fiscal	26
Work	19
Systemic Reform	16
Poverty	13
Social Relations	7
Economy	7
Values	6
Family	6

overall policy discourse, respectively. The other frames – Social Relations, Family, Economy and Values – received considerably less usage, each consisting of 6 or 7 percent of the overall discourse.[7]

Taken as a whole, these frequencies provide considerable evidence that the politics of guaranteed income policies were closely tied to debates about fiscal issues, such as concerns that growing welfare rolls were bankrupting city budgets, calls for a federal takeover of state-level welfare payments, and the attack on anti-poverty spending as part of the tax revolt in the mid-1970s. With the notable exception of work by Brown (1999), this fiscal dimension of welfare politics has been underplayed in most accounts of 20th century welfare policy development. The frequencies also show that frames organized around the poverty theme fall a distant fourth in the overall prevalence of the eight frames. This is a clear indication that, as Katz (1986) has argued, the politics of welfare reform is frequently about much more than poverty reduction.

Only five of the eight frame packages reached a level of more than 10 percent of the framing discourse during any of the periods, so the remaining analyses will focus on these five frames because it is here where the dynamism in policy framing occurred. Figure 1 displays the trend lines for these five frames over the four periods. The most dramatic change was the increasing prevalence of the Fiscal frame, which rose from 18 percent in Period 1 to 41 percent in Period 4. Use of the Work frame also increased over the course of the time period, rising from 10 percent during Period 1 to a high of 22 percent during Period 3, and ending at 19 percent during the last period. The three remaining frames decreased in usage over time. The Systemic Reform frame dropped from 25 percent to 11 percent, the Poverty frame dropped from 18 percent to 8 percent, and the Social Relations frame decreased from 13 percent to 2 percent. Strikingly, the direction of change for each frame was consistent across the four periods. In only one case – the small change in usage of the Work frame between Periods 3 and 4 – did a change between two periods deviate from the monotonic trajectory of the frame. This pattern suggests that some robust social processes structured the patterns of media discourse.

Which categories of actors did the most framing? Members of Congress advanced more frames than any other group, constituting 26 percent of the sources of policy frames. They were rivaled in prominence by actors within civil society, who advanced 25 percent of the framing discourse. Public officials at the state and local levels generated 19 percent of the

policy frames, followed by members of presidential administrations, who generated 16 percent of the frames, and by the president himself, who advanced 14 percent of the policy frames.

These percentages may suggest that there was not a great deal of difference between the types of actors who framed guaranteed income proposals during this period, however the relative prominence of the different groups of speakers shifted considerably over time. As Figure

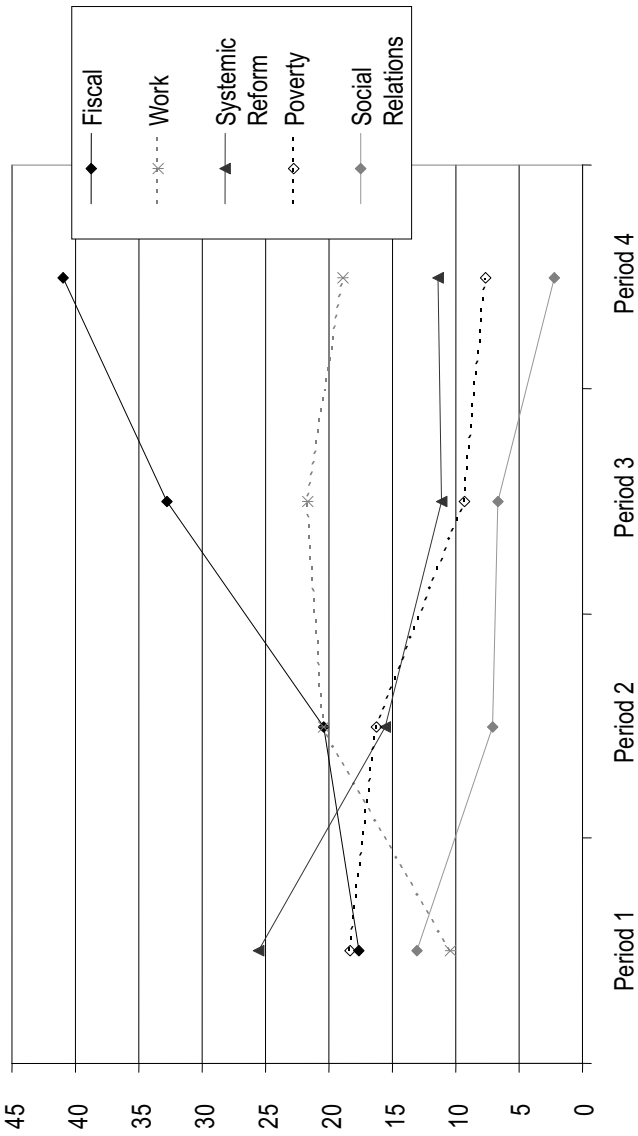

Figure 1. Trends for Five Frames, Percent of Total Framing Discourse

2 illustrates, several trends merit discussion. The most striking trend is the sharp and consistent decreasing representation of civic actors, who declined from 44 percent during Period 1 – during which they were by far the most prominent group – to 10 percent during Period 4. No other category of actor exhibited such consistent trends in representation over time. Among the other groups, the increasing representation of congressional actors was the clearest and most substantively large pattern. The shift in presidential framing between periods 3 and 4 also marked a substantial

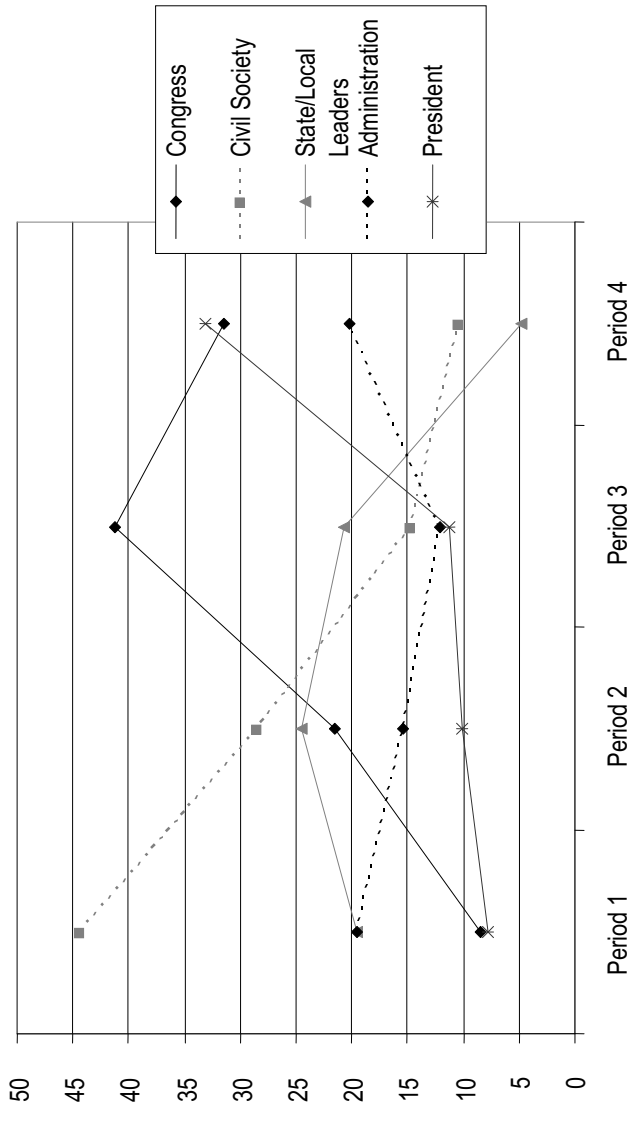

Figure 2. Trends in Actor Representation, Percent of Total Representation

change. Presidential representation tripled from 11 to 33 percent, which meant that Carter himself did considerably more framing than Nixon. In contrast, state and local officials did considerably less framing during the Carter era, decreasing in representation from 21 to 5 percent.

Taken together, the most prominent aggregate trend was the increasing representation of federal-level actors over the course of the debate. While these actors – comprising the president, members of his administration and members of Congress – constituted 36 percent of the speakers during Period 1, their representation increased to 47 percent, 65 percent, and 85 percent during the following three periods, respectively. This indicates an increase not only in the levels of "official discourse" on guaranteed income policy, but also a "federalization" of this discourse.

Table 2: Percent Usage of the Five Most Prevalent Frames, By Actor Category

FRAME	President	Administration	Congress	State/Local Leaders	Civil Society	TOTAL
Fiscal	20	22	26	44	15	*25*
Work	25	18	26	13	11	*19*
Systemic Reform	19	23	10	16	15	*17*
Poverty	9	13	11	8	20	*12*
Social Relations	3	5	6	5	16	*7*

A look at the framing vocabularies used by each category of actor suggests that these increasing levels of federal "official discourse" are potentially significant for explaining changes in framing discourse over time. Table 2 shows the five frames that each category of actor used most often during the entire period. The patterns reveal that federal-level actors framed guaranteed income policy in some similar ways, particularly when compared to non-federal actors. They used the Fiscal frame at similar rates, in contrast with civic actors and state and local officials, and they used the Work frame more than – in some cases twice as much as – these other actors as well. In contrast, civic actors and state and local officials framed guaranteed income policy in ways that diverged both from each other and from the federal actors. State and local politicians were roughly twice as likely to use the Fiscal frame as federal actors. Civic actors were roughly three times as likely to use the Social Relations frame as other actors and roughly twice as likely to use the Poverty frame. These different framing vocabularies suggest that trends in actor representation – such as the substantial

Table 3: Decomposition Analysis for Five Frames

			Percent Change Attributable to:	
Frame	Period	% Point Change	Actor Representation	Frame Adoption
Fiscal				
	Period 1 - 2	+3	29	71
	Period 2 - 3	+12	-8	108
	Period 3 - 4	+9	-72	172
Work				
	Period 1 - 2	+9	33	66
	Period 2 - 3	+2	178	-78
	Period 3 - 4	-3	-79	179
Poverty				
	Period 1 - 2	-2	54	46
	Period 2 - 3	-7	2	98
	Period 3 - 4	-3	-43	143
Social Relations				
	Period 1 - 2	-6	19	81
	Period 2 - 3	- 1	187	-87
	Period 3 - 4	-4	12	88
Systemic Reform				
	Period 1 - 2	-10	9	91
	Period 2 - 3	-5	10	90
	Period 3 - 4	+1	392	-292

drop in civic actors over the four periods, the drop among state and local officials in Period 4, or the increasing prevalence of federal-level speakers – may hold implications for trends in framing.

Decomposition analysis puts this to the test by assessing the simultaneous contribution of changes in actor representation and frame adoption to the overall patterns of policy framing. The analysis decomposed 15 distinct changes in policy framing – three changes for each of the five frames in question. The main finding, as Table 3 reports, is that the great majority of frame change is attributable to frame adoption rather than changes in actor representation. In other words, the overall change in policy framing that occurred across these four periods was the result of actors changing the frames they used rather than the shifting composition of the actors itself driving the change. Of these 15 instances of change, there were only four in which the actor representation component accounted for more of the change than the frame adoption component. In none of these four instances was the magnitude of the actual frame change between periods (listed under "Percentage Point Change") substantively large.

A closer examination of the trajectory of each of the five frame packages shows a consistent pattern: The changing representation of actors did not make substantial contributions to patterns in public discourse because

this potential influence was overwhelmed by the fact that speakers, given their representation, changed the frames they employed. For illustrative purposes, we can examine the rise of the Fiscal frame, which saw the largest substantive increase in prominence across the periods, in more detail (see Table 4). Between periods 2 and 3, the Fiscal frame increased by 12 percentage points. Among three of the five categories of actors, the use of the Fiscal frame increased considerably between these two periods: for congressional actors, from 11 to 32 percent; for civic actors, from 8 to 30 percent; and for the president, from 3 to 12 percent. The only category of actor that did not increase their use of this frame was administration officials, and their usage decreased by only 1 percentage point. Thus rates of frame adoption increased considerably between these two periods. In contrast, patterns in representation moved in different directions for different groups, which effectively canceled out the overall influence of representation to this instance. While congressional actors increased their representation from 21 to 41 percent, civic actors' representation decreased from 29 to 15 percent and representation on the part of officials within the administration and at the state and local levels each decreased by three percentage points. So while congressional actors were the driving force in this change – increasingly substantially in both their representation and their use of the Fiscal frame – the contribution of their increasing representation to the total change was offset by the decreasing representation of other groups.

The increase in the Work frame by 9 percentage points between Periods 1 and 2 is the biggest contribution of actor representation to a substantively large change in the framing patterns. In this instance, actor representation contributed 33 percent to the change. Most of this was attributable to the increasing representation of congressional actors (details not shown). While these actors' use of the Work frame increased only from 31 to 38 percent, their representation increased from 8 to 21 percent. The further increase in the prevalence of the Work frame in the subsequent period is overwhelmingly attributable to the influence of actor representation. Substantively, however, the Work frame only increased in prevalence by two percentage points, thereby making the actual contribution of actor representation to policy framing small.

The declines in the Systemic Reform, Poverty and Social Relations frames were the mirror image of the increases in the Fiscal and Work frames. Most of the substantively meaningful decreases resulted from changing patterns of frame adoption – that is, actors decreasing their use of these frames over time. This causal pattern is perhaps the most puzzling in regard to the decline of the Social Relations frame, because civic actors were, on average, three times more likely to use the Social Relations frame than were other groups and because their declining

Table 4: Fiscal Frame Decomposition, By Actor Category

	Representation %		Frame Adoption %		Contribution To Frame Change		Total Change Attributable to:	
Period 1 - Period 2								
Actor	Period 1	Period 2	Period 1	Period 2	Representation	Adoption	Representation	Adoption
Congress	8	21	8	11	.012	.005	.291	.709
Civil Society	44	29	15	8	-.018	-.024		
State/Local Leaders	20	24	30	51	.020	.046		
Administration	20	15	17	20	-.008	.005		
President	8	10	17	3	.002	-.012		
					.008	.020		
Period 2 - Period 3								
Actor	Period 2	Period 3	Period 2	Period 3	Representation	Adoption	Representation	Adoption
Congress	21	41	11	32	.042	.065	-.087	1.087
Civil Society	29	15	8	30	-.026	.048		
State/Local Leaders	24	21	51	57	-.021	.013		
Administration	15	12	20	19	-.006	-.001		
President	10	11	3	12	.001	.009		
					-.010	.134		
Period 3 - Period 4								
Actor	Period 3	Period 4	Period 3	Period 4	Representation	Adoption	Representation	Adoption
Congress	41	31	32	44	-.037	.044	-.721	1.721
Civil Society	15	10	30	31	-.013	.001		
State/Local Leaders	21	5	57	67	-.097	.013		
Administration	12	20	19	44	.025	.041		
President	11	33	12	39	.056	.060		
					-.066	.159		

representation parallels the decreasing use of the Social Relations frame. Yet their declining representation did not contribute to decreasing use in the frame. While the representation of civic groups dropped from 44 to 29 percent between periods 1 and 2, their use of the Social Relations frame also dropped from 21 to 12 percent. In other words, given civic actors' decreasing rate of using the Social Relations frame, increasing their representation would have done little to increase the relative prominence of the Social Relations frame.

The Poverty and Systemic Reform frames also declined over time. The slight dip in the Poverty frame between periods 1 and 2 was based on roughly equivalent influences of actor representation and frame adoption, but the substantively larger decline between periods 2 and 3 was almost exclusively a function of frame adoption. This was part of an across the board decrease in use of the Poverty frame among all five groups, with the sharpest decreases occurring among congressional actors and those within the administration. The largest declines in the Systemic Reform frame were also driven by frame adoption. In the largest change, between periods 1 to 2, members of Congress, state and local officials, and members of the administration each used this frame considerably less, from 15 to 5 percent, 30 to 15 percent, and 40 to 13 percent, respectively.

Discussion

The debate over guaranteed income policy was initially crowded with a variety of competing frames. Yet by the late 1970s, the Fiscal frame, and to a lesser extent the Work frame, dominated the discourse on welfare reform. The growing prevalence of these frames, and the attendant decline of others, did not mean that the actors covered in the media shared the same policy positions. Far from it. But it did mean that these actors debated the merits of welfare reform proposals mainly on fiscal and work-related grounds. This was in contrast to the situation in the late 1960s, when reform was just as likely to be discussed in terms of societal divisions or reducing the number of people who lived in poverty.

Trends in actor representation tracked these changes in the shifting distribution of policy frames. Federal officials came to dominate welfare discourse as Fiscal and Work frames rose in prominence relative to other frames. This correlation suggested the possibility of a causal relationship between changing actor representation and changes in policy framing. Yet the decomposition analysis showed that the actor representation hypothesis accounts for little of the observed change in policy framing. It was not the case that actors held their framing strategies constant and that the diminishing representation of some categories of actors explains change in policy discourse. For example, even though actors in

civil society steadily declined in representation across the four periods, they also simultaneously increased their usage of the dominant Fiscal and Work frames relative to alternatives. The patterns in the decomposition analysis provide little support for a straight-forward application of theories in which the composition of actors given voice in the media is the primary mechanism of discursive change.

Another pattern that is consonant with an actor representation perspective is possible, yet to explore it requires data beyond the single news source used here. Federal officials may have so effectively established the terms of debate with their dominant frames that journalists then sought out other types of actors to respond primarily to this dominant framing. Notably, if this were the case, it would shed light on the "balance" thesis in media studies, which posits that journalists seek out opposing viewpoints on issues (e.g., Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). What this would suggest is that journalists seek out different policy positions *within* the dominant frames – e.g., debates over more or less spending or the pros and cons of work requirements – rather than seeking balance *between* different frames altogether. To fully explore the possibility that alternative frames were excluded from mainstream news coverage would of course require a comparison across a variety of data sources, which is beyond the scope of this paper. In particular, it would require looking at *alternative* media outlets, since existing studies of multiple media sources suggest that the frames used in news reports do not vary much across mainstream outlets (Gamson 1992; Neuman et al. 1992).

In contrast to the actor representation mechanism, the frame adoption mechanism – or more specifically, ideational diffusion – was the main factor contributing to frame change in welfare policy debates. The pattern in the decomposition analysis is clear. Though the media analysis presented here does not contain direct evidence illuminating the underlying reasons for the diffusion of the Fiscal and Work frames, evidence in the broader historical record is consistent with two sets of expectations from scholarship on the diffusion of ideas.

First, in their study of the diffusion of "globalization" discourse in the 1980s and 1990s, Fiss and Hirsch (2005) examine the conditions that contribute to the spread of discursive frames. They found that changing economic and political conditions, such as levels of U.S.-global integration, played a significant role in explaining the timing and location of the spread of globalization frames. In addition, they argue that such discourse not only articulated with underlying macro-structural transformations, but that it also facilitated the "sense-making" process as interested actors endeavored to understand this period of rapid change. Second, Strang and Meyer (1993) contend that ideas are more likely to diffuse if the objects to which they are linked come to be viewed as categorically

similar. They argue that "the cultural understanding that social entities belong to a common social category constructs a tie between them" and that as objects "are seen as falling into the same category, diffusion should be rapid." (Strang and Meyer 1993:490) One mechanism through which this process occurs is what the authors call "theorization," through which actors place discrete entities together in the same category at a higher level of abstraction.

These studies of ideational diffusion point to two general underlying processes – structural transformation and perceptions of similarity within a field – that bear directly on the rise of both the Fiscal and Work frames in debates over guaranteed income policy. The Fiscal frame arose during a period of increasing economic crisis in the United States, characterized by sharply rising rates of inflation and unemployment and the demise of the reigning Keynesian economic orthodoxy. In this context, conservatives and liberals alike began to link spending on federal welfare programs, which had been viewed as categorically distinct from other policy areas in the 1960s, with problems of waste, fraud and inefficiency in a host of other distinct policy domains, such as housing, health and education (Califano 1981). This bundle of programs collectively became the target of antipathy toward domestic government spending of many types, setting the stage for the "tax revolt" of the late 1970s in which fiscal concerns were foremost (Lo 1990).

Similar processes, though relating more directly to perceptions of the poor, underlie the rise of the Work frame. The late 1960s and 1970s saw a sharp increase in the government welfare rolls, a growing association between welfare policy and race, and an increasing percentage of unwed mothers receiving public assistance benefits. As the perceived target population of welfare programs shifted toward blacks and unwed mothers, characterizations of the poor in terms of "welfare dependency" increased substantially in public discourse (Misra et al. 2003). "Dependency" became an umbrella concept that increasingly defined the condition of blacks, women, and single-parents. Because the nearly-universal remedy for "dependency" was held to be work (e.g., Gilder 1981), the upsurge in dependency rhetoric and work-related welfare policy frames went hand in hand.

Conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that it is possible to quantitatively assess the relative contribution of shifting collective actors and competing ideas to changes in policy discourse. Decomposing the influence of these factors is possible because of the approach to policy discourse developed in the paper – namely, an *embodied* approach that explicitly links policy frames with the actors who employ them. While this analytic and methodological

approach is clearly generalizable to other policy issues, the substantive patterns may vary due to domain specific differences.

Research on abortion policy conducted by Ferree et al. (2002) provides an illuminating basis for comparison. The authors found that, in contrast to welfare reform, civic advocacy organizations played a consistently central role in debates over abortion from the 1970s through the 1990s, particularly feminist organizations in the United States. Ferree and her colleagues in fact found that framing by civic actors *expanded* over the course of the time period they examined. Decomposition analysis along the lines developed here could determine whether the continuing presence of civic actors significantly impacted abortion discourse, for example, by mitigating the trends toward increasing "official discourse" found in the case of welfare reform. Examinations of other policy domains might also require categorizing collective actors across different types of dimensions. In the area of health policy, the most relevant distinctions might be between politicians, medical specialists, insurance providers and consumer groups.

Future research in this vein could advance research on policy framing along a few different fronts while still using a single media source. First, studies could examine the connection between actor representation and the precipitating events that act as the news pegs in press accounts. If news reports on policy issues are increasingly driven over time by coverage of congressional hearings or other legislative processes, then it would not be surprising if the policy frames came primarily from "official sources" and reflected "official" concerns. Alternatively, coverage of mass demonstrations would be expected to generate more frames from civic actors and, presumably, different types of frames. Second, studies could devote more attention to journalistic practices, especially the ways in which journalists themselves frame issues when the frames presented in new stories are not attributed to particular spokespeople or categories of actors. Would these frames mirror those propounded by prominent media spokespeople, thereby amplifying the prevalence of the dominant frames? Or do journalists frame issues along lines that are distinct from their primary sources? Third, comparative examinations of multiple policy domains could provide further leverage for sorting out period effects that simultaneously affect framing across a variety of policy domains. This would be especially germane to studying diffusion processes. For instance, the 1970s could well have seen a rise in fiscal framing across a whole range of policy debates because of the economic crises that beset the country. Advancing framing research along these lines, while linking frames and their proponents, promises to advance our understanding of the changing terrain of policy discourse.

Notes

1. Closely related to policy frames are collective action frames within the social movements literature. The seminal article on collective action framing is Snow et al. (1986) and the development of framing within this literature has been reviewed by its leading practitioners in a number of places (e.g., Benford and Snow 2000). Though collective action frames and policy frames are related concepts, they can be distinguished by differences in their scope, location, and function. Policy frames primarily shape perceptions toward specific issues rather than foster collective action. (Of course some frames do both.) Due to this primary difference, policy frames are also more likely to exist in multi-organizational fields, target a wider audience, and be located in the media.

2. For more detail on the history of guaranteed income policies, see Steensland (2008).

3. I omitted non-news stories from the analysis because the actor representation mechanism cannot be applied to editorials and transcripts, since in these formats the authors rarely rely on sources and therefore frames are not linked with actors. Actor representation could be examined with op-ed pieces, but only at the article level (by examining who is seen as an authority on welfare-related issues), not the frame level, which is what I examine here.

4. After research assistants coded the full population of articles, I inspected each of the frame instances individually and subsequently recategorized 5 percent of the frames out of concerns for accuracy. Comparisons between the original and revised data set showed no systematic differences except for a small decrease in the prevalence of the Work frames and a small increase in the Economy frame in the revised data set. The patterns in the decomposition analysis for the two data sets were substantively the same.

5. The period between January 1973 and December 1976 is omitted because guaranteed income plans were not seriously considered during this period and therefore there were relatively few policy frames pertaining to guaranteed income plans in the media.

6. For example, differences in the death rate between two populations can be decomposed as the contribution of the difference in age distributions and the contribution of the rate schedule differences between the two populations. Kitagawa (1955) formulated the strategy of decomposition analysis that I employ here and it is discussed in Preston et al. (2000).

7. Excluded from these analyses are 2 percent of the frames that did not fall neatly into one of the eight categories and 2 percent of articles that contained no frames, even though the articles discussed guaranteed income policies.

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Appendix: Policy Frames and Common Subsidiary Themes

Systemic Reform
- Necessity of welfare system reform (concerning efficiency, efficacy, etc.)
- Necessity of national welfare standards
- Provision of in-kind services vs. cash benefit payments
- Federalism; role of states in welfare administration decisions

Fiscal Management
- Federal take-over of welfare payments
- Welfare costs as federal responsibility
- Federal fiscal crisis
- State and/or local fiscal crisis
- Size of welfare rolls and expenditures
- Government spending (general)

Work
- Work incentives
- Work requirements
- Dependency
- Lazy poor
- Welfare fraud
- Work ethic

Poverty
- Economic need
- Low income
- Guaranteed minimum living standards
- Working poor
- Percent in America poor

Social Relations
- Rights/Entitlement
- Race
- Gender
- Economic class
- Income inequality
- Urban disorder
- Degradation

Appendix ***continued***

Family

- Family stability
- Absent fathers; desertion
- Effects of mothers' employment on families
- Teen pregnancy
- High birthrates
- Effect of poverty on families/children

Labor Market

- Labor market processes
- Employment
- Free market for labor
- Wage levels

Social Values

- Freedom
- Dignity
- Compassion
- Equality
- Fairness
- Shame