



# Framing dynamics and claimsmaking after the Parkland shooting\*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper unpacks how dynamic political and media systems shape the kinds of frames political actors champion, when and how they express support for frames and the implications of both for individual claimsmaking. To do so, we conduct a rigorous qualitative analysis of discourse during a two-week period in which the Florida legislature considered and passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act after a shooter killed 17 people in Parkland, Florida. We systematically explore how two framing dynamics – competition and amplification – shape what frames political actors champion and the relative effects of these dynamics on individual claimsmaking in 438 letters to the editor and op-eds appearing in mainstream outlets, 4,962 emails sent to Florida Governor Rick Scott, and 1,000 tweets. We find that amplification and competition shape the relative visibility of frames and the frequency with which individuals use these frames in their claimsmaking. Generally speaking, gun control and progressive groups selectively amplified frames associated with the emerging, student-led Never Again Marjory Stoneman Douglas movement and legislative frames that were consistent with their goals. This seems to have increased the visibility of these ideas in mainstream outlets and influenced claimsmaking insofar as individuals drew on amplified frames across the forums relatively frequently. This was not true of frames opposing gun control. Gun rights groups bickered with politicians and among themselves. As a result, gun rights frames were less prevalent in mainstream discourse and in individual claimsmaking.

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Social scientists have long been interested in political claimsmaking. Indeed, what ideas influence how individuals think and talk about political issues are core concerns for sociologists, political scientists and communication scholars (Entman, 2003; Gamson, 1992;

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Iyengar, 1987). However, understanding the potential influence of political actors, who promote their particularistic interpretations of an issue, on individual claimsmaking, or the statements made by an individual in a given setting (McCright & Dunlap, 2000), is complicated for at least two reasons. First, different kinds of media do not simply coexist, but form a ‘hybrid media system’ that evolves as ‘newer’ and ‘older’ media logics, or ‘bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors and organizational forms’ interact with one another (Chadwick 2013: 4). Among other things, this means that savvy political actors can strategically leverage the affordances of different forums to maximize the impact of their ideas, making how they promote their perspectives difficult to track.

Second, and central to this paper, understanding the potential influence of political actors on individual claimsmaking is complicated by dynamics such as competition. Public attention is a scarce resource and, political elites vie with other actors, such as social movements, to garner support for their frames, or interpretations of political problems and their solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). This is true even in the digital age because the number of outlets catering to niche political predispositions, and the actors competing for these audiences, abound (Tufekci, 2013). Consequently, it is not always easy for political actors to reach a larger audience, let alone shape how they understand political issues.

This paper begins to unpack how two framing dynamics – competition and amplification – shape the kinds of frames different political actors champion, when and how they express support for these frames, and the implications of both for the kinds of frames individuals use in their claimsmaking through a ‘deep’ qualitative analysis (Ragin, 1994) of discourse after the Parkland shooting. On February 14, 2018, a 19-year old former student killed 17 people and injured 17 others at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The shooting sparked protest over loose gun laws, and state legislatures across the country passed bills to restrict gun access. This was true even in the state of Florida, whose Republican-dominated legislature often rejects even modest restrictions on gun access. In less than a month, the Florida legislature passed SB 7026, ‘the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act,’ which raised the minimum age requirement for purchasing a firearm from 18 to 21, required a three-day waiting period for the purchase of a gun, prohibited the purchase and selling of bump stocks, expanded mental health services in the state, allocated monies to help harden schools, and funded a ‘marshal’ program that allowed the arming of some teachers and staff.<sup>1</sup>

Here, we analyze framing dynamics through an analysis of media coverage as well as the websites and publications of relevant political actors during a two-week period in which the Florida legislature considered and passed SB 7026. Then, we explore the potential implications these dynamics on individual claimsmaking through an analysis of 438 letters to the editor and op-eds appearing in news outlets, 4,962 emails sent to Florida governor Rick Scott, and 1,000 tweets. We find that amplification and competition seem to shape the relative visibility of frames and the frequency with which individuals use these frames in their claimsmaking. Generally speaking, gun control groups selectively amplified frames associated with the emerging, student-led Never Again Marjory Stoneman Douglas movement and legislative frames that were consistent with their missions. This may have increased the visibility of these ideas in news outlets and influenced

claimsmaking insofar as individuals drew on amplified frames across the forums relatively frequently. This was not true of frames opposing gun control. Gun rights groups bickered with politicians and among themselves. Consequently, gun rights frames were less prevalent in mainstream discourse and in individual claimsmaking. We conclude the paper with a discussion of our findings, highlighting the need to explore how feedback loops between political actors and individuals influence frame amplification in future research.

## **Framing dynamics and claimsmaking in a hybrid media system**

The framing perspective as articulated by social movement scholars serves as our conceptual starting point. They understand issue framing as a dynamic process that involves (in)direct interactions among actors who compete and cooperate with one another to influence public debate regarding political problems and their solutions (Benford & Snow, 2000). Most research focuses on competitive dynamics among likeminded groups, highlighting their potentially deleterious effects on their ability to frame policy debates and get media attention (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Competition can cause infighting within movements, which can lead to unflattering coverage and undermine public support for a movement and its goals (Benford, 1993). Competitive framing dynamics involve more than likeminded groups. Other actors, including opposing groups, elected officials, and bureaucrats, also work to frame debates for their own purposes (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). In short, competition can make it difficult for political actors to get their ideas out to a broader public.

Competition isn't the only dynamic possible. Actors can strategically align their messaging and amplify a frame that explains a problem, its causes or its solution; a process known as frame amplification (Benford & Snow, 2000). When frame amplification is public-facing, actors may intentionally synchronize how they discuss problems and their solutions. Elected officials sometimes coordinate their messaging in speeches and media appearances in an effort to influence how a broader public understands political issues (Harris, 2005). Similarly, activists and elected officials sometimes work together on legislation and its marketing in order to mobilize support around a policy change (Goldstone, 2003). Frame amplification does not require explicit coordination. Activist groups representing different populations and causes routinely coalesce around frames and amplify problems and their solutions on social media in response to political events (Liu & Harlow, 2020). Moreover, frame amplification may occur even among actors who largely disagree on political issues. Legislators and activists may throw their support behind a frame if it allows them to forward their goals (Whittier, 2018). This type of amplification seems increasingly likely in the digital age. Movement groups, for instance, can leverage the relative privacy of email campaigns and amplify legislative frames that they support, while downplaying ideas and initiatives that are not consistent with their goals.

These dynamics likely have implications for individual claimsmaking. Social scientists find that ideas that get a lot of mainstream media attention can influence how people think and talk about social problems (Best, 2013). This is true even in a hybrid media system. The information economy is in the hands of a small number of companies (McChesney, 2013), giving mainstream outlets an advantage when it comes to framing

political debates. News media proffer interpretive constructs for understanding political problems, their causes and their solutions (Iyengar & Simon, 1993), and individuals, who see the same stories in the same outlets on- and off-line (Flaxman et al., 2016; Nechushtai & Lewis, 2019), integrate the frames received via news into their conversations (Gamson, 1992; Kwak et al., 2005) and claimsmaking (Rohlinger et al., 2015).

We argue that framing dynamics can improve – or worsen – the visibility of ideas and, potentially, whether or not individuals use these ideas in their claimsmaking. Frame amplification may increase the relative visibility of – and increase the rate at which – individuals employ these frames in their own argumentation. Frame competition, in contrast, may decrease the relative visibility of ideas and the rate at which these ideas are used in individual claimsmaking.

There are three caveats. First, political actors are strategic communicators who may selectively engage in competition and amplification. Activist groups that agree on little else other than a broad goal will set aside their differences when they feel like they may lose a political battle (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). In these instances, groups that typically challenge the frames of their generally likeminded allies may amplify one or more of their ideas (Rohlinger, 2015). Second, and related, how political actors engage in amplification may vary. Likeminded organizations may take a divide-and-conquer approach with different groups targeting and amplifying frames on different forums. Groups that are newsworthy or have standing with journalists may target mainstream news outlets, while groups less central to an event work to amplify ideas online. Alternatively, groups looking for a political win (or to stave off a loss), may selectively amplify frames, and do so in forums, such as email, that are less visible to a broader public. Finally, different forums have different affordances, which affects individual claimsmaking. The character limits of Twitter, for example, mean that individual claimsmaking is more likely to be terse than email, where length is not an issue and individuals often use polite language to appeal to their target (Bunz & Campbell, 2004; Gligoric et al., 2018). Moreover, individuals have a lot of freedom in terms of how they communicate political ideas. Some individuals will integrate the frames of political actors into their claimsmaking, while others will adopt movement messages whole cloth and share them on a forum (Freelon et al., 2018).

## Data and methods

As a first step in exploring how political actors potentially shape individual claimsmaking, we used Newsbank to identify 316 news stories published in Florida newspapers, metro city newspapers across the country, and stories that aired on broadcast news during the two-week period in which the Florida legislature considered and passed SB 7026 (February 23, 2018 to March 9, 2018). Drawing on existing research of school shootings, we used a combination of deductive and inductive content analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to generate a list of frames common to coverage, such as the focus on causes of shootings and the political response to an incident (Maguire et al., 2002; Schildkraut et al., 2018). Then, using NVivo 12, the lead researcher employed inductive coding to identify the presence of these frames as well as the actors with which these ideas were associated.<sup>2</sup> Identifying who made an argument was an important step since some actors served as a hook for a story, but did not provide an interpretative

frame of the event. This process generated a list of 29 frames and 12 relevant actors. A second researcher coded 10% of the sample. Reliability scores showed that there was substantial agreement among the coders in terms of how to code media content relative to these categories ( $\kappa = .93$ ). The frames are listed in Table 2 and discussed below. We, then, drew on existing research of the gun rights and gun control movements to identify other potentially relevant actors (Carlson, 2015; Gross, 2008), and conducted searches to see whether and how they responded to the shooting and the actions/statements of other political actors. Finally, we combined these data and created a timeline so that we could assess which actors were the most engaged as well as the framing dynamics at play.

Once this process was complete, we analyzed individual claimsmaking in three forums – letters to the editor and op-eds, email, and Twitter – to assess whether competition and amplification seemed to influence the kinds of statements individuals made. We chose these forums for two, related reasons. First, so that we could explore whether/how political actors differently engaged in competition and amplification during the two-week period. Second, so that we could begin to assess whether/how individuals engaged amplified frames across forums with diverse affordances. We analyzed 438 op-eds and letters to the editor in the same outlets in which news stories appeared. We coded for frames that were mentioned in news coverage and noted when new frames appeared. Second, we analyzed 4,962 emails sent to Florida Governor Rick Scott regarding the shooting and SB 7026. These communications are publicly available through Florida Statute Chapter 119.01. We imported the emails into NVivo 12 and coded whether an email supported gun control/SB 7026, opposed gun control/SB 7026, or both, and assessed whether emails consisted of ‘original’ content or were part of a movement campaign.<sup>3</sup> Then, we used deductive and inductive coding to identify frames in the emails. We began with the same frames used for the news coverage analysis. Since individuals tend to either praise a politician’s course of action or try to persuade them to act differently (Rohlinger & Vaccaro, 2021; Rohlinger et al., 2015), we coded the emails for ideas regarding what actions individuals argued Scott should take on the bill (e.g., sign or veto), the potential positive and negative consequences of the bill, and ideas related to gun control and gun rights more generally. This process generated a list of 43 frames. A second researcher coded 10% of the sample. Reliability scores showed that there was substantial agreement among the coders in terms of how to code email content relative to these categories ( $\kappa = .89$ ).

Finally, we used Twython (McGrath 2019) to capture/save tweets to a database the day following the Parkland Shooting through March 9, 2018 using 14 keywords associated with the incident, the gun control and the gun rights debate.<sup>4</sup> 19,723 tweets and retweets were posted during the two weeks of interest. Based on the hashtags and keywords used to find tweets relevant to Parkland and the gun debate, 13,632 seemed to favor gun control, 5,682 seemed to advocate for gun rights, and 409 mentioned guns but did not clearly note support for/opposition to gun control. We randomly sampled 500 tweets associated with gun control and 500 tweets associated with gun rights. We threw out tweets if they were irrelevant or if the user account had been suspended, and replaced them with another randomly chosen tweet. Using this strategy, we sampled 764 tweets to get 500 relevant gun control tweets and sampled 601 tweets to get 500 relevant gun rights tweets.<sup>5</sup> More irrelevant tweets were captured relative to gun control keywords because #neveragain was frequently used in reference to poor personal choices and in reference to the Holocaust.

We used a combination of deductive and inductive coding to analyze the tweets. We imported the sample of 1,000 tweets into NVivo 12 and deductively coded for the presence of frames that emerged in news stories, op-eds, letters to the editor, and emails. The lead researcher inductively coded the tweets again to capture additional relevant frames. This process generated a total of 75 frames. Tweets were coded for up to three frames in order of appearance, excluding hashtags/keywords. We coded the text of the tweet first, and, if available, we viewed the original tweet and coded additional frames (e.g., frames relative to retweeted content or attached images with text). A second researcher coded 10% of the sample. Reliability scores showed that there was substantial agreement among the coders in terms of how to code tweets relative to these categories ( $\kappa = .85$ ).

### **Framing dynamics after Parkland**

Following the shooting several political actors worked to frame the debate over how legislators should respond. Student survivors were among the first to weigh in. Most of these students were part of the emerging Never Again Marjory Stoneman Douglas (Never Again) movement, which was founded by three survivors. The trio started a Facebook page for the movement, and it gained more than 35,000 followers in three days. The founders expanded its leadership ranks to include Emma González and David Hogg, and, within days, they marched on Florida's capitol and pressured republicans to vote for a democrat-sponsored bill that would ban assault-style weapons and accessories. Republicans voted against the bill, arguing that the prohibition of assault-style guns would cede too much authority to the government and diminish citizens' constitutional rights.<sup>6</sup>

The student response was twofold. First, they announced a nationwide 'March for Our Lives,' scheduled for the 24th of March. The march received a lot of attention as well as backing from celebrities and movement groups, such as the Brady Campaign for Gun Safety (Brady), Everytown for Gun Safety (Everytown) and ThinkProgress. Second, the students vowed to speak out against politicians accepting money from the National Rifle Association (NRA), arguing that this transactional relationship was responsible for Florida's loose gun laws. ThinkProgress aided this effort by circulating a list of corporations that provided NRA members discounts on their services via social media, and calling on the companies to either sever their ties with the group or risk a boycott. Companies including Delta and United, all quickly, and publicly, canceled their programs. Other companies, including Dick's Sporting Goods, Walmart, LL Bean and Kroger, raised the age requirement to purchase a gun from 18 to 21 years-old, and Dick's quit selling assault-style rifles altogether.

Florida republicans largely took their policy cues from then-president Donald Trump and the NRA. Trump voiced support for some gun control following the shooting, including the regulation of bump stocks and raising the minimum age to buy or own a gun to 21-years old. Then, following a meeting with the NRA, Trump endorsed an NRA-backed 'marshal program' that would train and arm faculty and staff in schools. Florida legislators and Rick Scott responded to these developments, the former with a flurry of bills and the latter with an 'action plan' to address gun violence. The bills circulating in the legislature and Scott's 'action plan' were similar, and reflected the positions championed by Trump. Both focused on making it more difficult for a violent or



mentally ill person to purchase or possess a firearm, raised the legal minimum age to purchase a firearm, with some exceptions, banned the purchase or sale of bump stocks, increased law enforcement presence in schools, and added funding for the hardening of schools, for active shooter training and for increasing the number of mental health professionals on campuses. The big difference between the two was the inclusion of the marshal program, which Scott – not to mention democrats and educators – did not support.

Marion Hammer, former NRA president and a powerful lobbyist in the state, opposed the legislation beyond the marshal program. She argued that the shooter was ‘deranged’ and that, since the shooter’s concerning behavior had been documented by the school and reported to law enforcement, the incident reflected institutional failures rather than a problem with existing laws. Moreover, she suggested that the proposed age requirement increase was ‘discriminatory’ against young people and ‘an attack on the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding people.’ While the NRA largely responded to the attacks on itself and partnering companies, Hammer launched two campaigns, which she hoped would stop the bill from becoming law (discussed below). That said, not all gun rights groups immediately backed Hammer or her messages. Groups, including Gun Owners of America, expressed animosity toward the NRA and Hammer for their ‘compromising positions’ on gun rights. Florida Gun Owners blamed Hammer’s ‘cozy relationship with the political class’ for the legislation, and the dissolution of the traditional family and Hollywood for the shooting. However, as SB 7026 headed for Scott’s desk for a signature, it and other gun rights groups launched their own efforts to stop the bill, which largely focused on the prohibition of bump stocks, and echoed some of Hammer’s messages.

Gun control proponents rallied around the Never Again movement and Florida’s legislation. The Brady Campaign sent busloads of kids to the ‘March for Our Lives,’ democratic mega-donor, Tom Steyer, pledged a million dollars to gun-safety groups focused on registering high school students to vote, and Everytown gave out more than one million dollars in grants to local organizers planning sister marches. Additionally, Everytown alerted its Florida members to urge legislators, and then Scott, to pass a bill that would begin to reduce gun violence in the state. On 9 March, Scott signed SB 7026 into law. The Never Again students expressed disappointment with the law and vowed to register and mobilize students who would vote out NRA-backed politicians.

In sum, a clear set of political actors sought to frame the debate after the shooting. Democrats and gun control advocates pushed for increased regulation, and rallied around the nascent Never Again movement, which brought renewed attention to the NRA and politicians taking its money. Republicans focused less on the regulation of guns and more on who should (or shouldn’t) have access to guns and on schools themselves. Framing dynamics also were at play (Summarized in [Table 1](#)). Progressive and gun control groups amplified some of the frames of the student-led movement and of Florida legislators, although they targeted different forums with their support. Framing dynamics among republicans and gun rights groups were more competitive. Republicans bickered over what should be included in the bill, and Hammer criticized republicans and their efforts altogether. At the same time, other gun rights groups disparaged Hammer and her positions, and provided their own frames opposing the legislation.

These framing dynamics may have influenced frame visibility on both sides of the debate. Amplification meant that actors favoring gun control coalesced around a few frames, which may have increased the visibility of these ideas in news coverage. News coverage favored gun control legislation (24.1% of the 316 news stories), featured Parkland victims (14.9%), and mentioned/favorably discussed the Never Again movement (16.8% and 12.4% respectively) relatively frequently.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, coverage highlighted the availability of AR-15s and bump stocks as a cause of mass shootings (26.9%) as well as identified the NRA (14.9%) and republicans taking NRA money (10.1%) as obstacles to gun control legislation. In contrast, frame competition among gun rights advocates lead to a greater number of frames vying for attention, which may account for the relatively low frequency of the frames. Eleven of the fifteen frames supporting gun rights received 7.6% or fewer mentions in news coverage. The frames that received the most attention – those involving mental health (21.8% of the 316 news stories), focusing on the failures of law enforcement (17.7%), and advocating for the hardening of schools (17.7%) – had support from elected officials, from either the NRA or Hammer, or from Everytown. Given these patterns, we would expect frames associated with gun control, particularly those involving the Never Again movement, to be relatively prominent in individual claimsmaking. In contrast, we would expect individual claimsmaking around gun rights to reflect competitive dynamics, meaning more frames will be referenced and they will generally appear at lower rates across the forums.

## Findings

### *Individual claimsmaking in editorial content*

Table 2 summarizes the frames mentioned in individual claimsmaking in news and editorial content during the two-week period.<sup>8</sup> We use Pearson Chi-Square to assess whether there are significant differences in the distribution of the frames between news coverage and the claims made by individuals in letters to the editor/op-eds.<sup>9</sup> There are three points worth making about Table 2. First, frames associated with gun control are among the most mentioned in the content. More important, several frames associated with the Never Again movement are mentioned significantly more often in editorial than in news content. 71.5% of letters to the editor and op-eds favored gun control, 68.0% mentioned the Never Again movement favorably, and 72.0%, 77.3%, and 76.3% pinpointed the NRA, republicans, and Trump as the main obstacles to gun control. Additionally, two frames – opposition to the marshal program and the identification of AR-15's and accessories as the cause of school shootings – were as likely to be discussed in news content as they were in editorial content. This lends some support for our expectation that frame amplification not only made gun control frames more visible in news coverage, but also individual claimsmaking in editorial content.

Second, frames associated with gun rights are among the least mentioned in editorial content. While opposition to gun control is as likely to be mentioned in editorial content as it is in news coverage, key arguments regarding the causes of the shooting (e.g., mistakes by law enforcement) and opposition to raising the to purchase a gun to 21 (legislating discrimination) are significantly more likely to be mentioned in news, not editorial, content. The only frame that had more traction in editorial than news content involved discussions of the founding fathers and their desires; a frame which only received 20



**Table 1.** Summary of Framing Dynamics.

	Frame	Actors supporting the frame
<i>Gun Control</i>		
<u>General</u>	Restricting gun access will reduce gun violence	Gun control groups, Florida democrats
<u>Causes of and solutions to mass shootings</u>	The NRA is an obstacle to gun control	Never Again, ThinkProgress
	Republicans who take NRA money are an obstacle to gun control	Never Again, ThinkProgress
	Corporations that incentivize NRA memberships are an obstacle to gun control	ThinkProgress
	Ban AR-15's and bump stocks	Never Again, Gun control groups, Florida democrats
<u>Response to opponents</u>	Arming faculty and staff makes schools more dangerous	Scott, Florida democrats, Never Again, Florida Educational Association
<i>Gun Rights</i>		
<u>General</u>	Gun rights are constitutionally protected	Gun rights groups, Florida republicans, Scott
	Founding fathers wanted us to be able to fight govt	Gun rights groups
	Limiting gun rights will not prevent gun violence	Gun rights groups
<u>Causes of mass shootings</u>	Mistakes made by law enforcement led to school shooting	Hammer, some Florida republicans
	Shortcomings in administrative processes and safety protocols at schools led to shooting	Hammer, Florida republicans
	Mental instability led to school shooting	Hammer, Florida republicans
	Break down of the traditional family led to the shooting	Other gun rights groups
	Hollywood violence caused the shooting	Other gun rights groups
<u>Solution to shootings</u>	Regulate bump stocks	Trump, Florida republicans, Scott
	Raise the minimum age to own a gun	Trump, Florida republicans, Scott
	Harden schools	Gun rights groups, Florida republicans, Scott, Everytown
	Train and arm faculty and staff	Trump, NRA, Hammer, Florida republicans
	Keep guns out of the hands of mentally unstable individuals	Florida republicans, Scott, Everytown
	Fire Sheriff Israel for botching the response to the shooting	Other gun rights groups
<u>Response to opponents</u>	Raising the minimum age for gun ownership discriminates against young people	NRA, Hammer
	Limiting the ownership and purchase of bump stocks criminalizes law abiding citizens	NRA, Hammer, other gun rights groups (later)
	Throw out SB 7206 in its entirety	Other gun rights groups
	NRA represents law-abiding citizens and is not the problem	NRA

mentions in total. Finally, even frames that were championed by both republicans and gun rights groups are more likely to be mentioned in news content. Discussions regarding the causes of school shootings (e.g., mental health) and solutions to them (such as school hardening and the marshal program) are more likely to appear in news content. These findings are consistent with extant research that suggests that competitive dynamics has deleterious effects on the ability of political actors to effectively frame debates (Benford, 1993), and suggest that competition may influence claimsmaking as well. In short, we find some initial support for our expectations.

**Table 2.** Summary of Frames and Claims Mentioned in News and Editorial Content\*.

		# of total Mentions	Percentage	Percentage
<u>General</u>			News	Editorial
	Favors gun control***	267	28.5%	71.5%
	Opposes gun control	50	48.0%	52.0%
	Mentions gun control***	43	76.7%	23.3%
	Mentions gun rights***	24	75.0%	25.0%
<u>FL Legislation</u>				
<u>Support</u>				
	Mentions FL bill***	145	72.4%	27.6%
	Mixed support for FL bill***	25	76.0%	24.0%
	Support for FL bill	18	55.6%	44.4%
	Opposition to FL bill	8	50.0%	50.0%
<u>Never Again Support</u>				
	Never Again Movement (favorable)*	122	32.0%	68.0%
	Never Again Movement (mention)***	71	74.6%	25.4%
	Celebrity support for Never Again***	15	93.3%	6.7%
	Never Again Movement (unfavorable)	3	33.3%	66.7%
<u>Gun Control Frames</u>				
<u>Causes of shootings</u>				
	AR-15's and accessories	219	38.8%	61.2%
	Corporate support of NRA	13	15.4%	84.6%
<u>Obstacles to gun control</u>				
	NRA is the obstacle to gun control***	168	28.0%	72.0%
	Republicans are the obstacle to gun control***	141	22.7%	77.30%
	Trump is an obstacle to gun control*	38	23.7%	76.3%
	Democrats are obstacle to gun control	22	31.8%	68.2%
<u>SB 7026</u>				
	Opposes arming teachers	99	50.5%	49.5%
<u>Other</u>				
	Victims experiences discussed***	60	78.3%	21.7%
<u>Gun Rights Frames</u>				
<u>Causes of shootings</u>				
	Mental health problems***	112	61.6%	38.4%
	Law enforcement failures***	92	60.9%	39.1%
	Hollywood violence	33	38.1%	61.9%
	Breakdown of the family**	13	0.0%	100.0%
	Loss of religious values	11	18.2%	81.8%
<u>SB 7026</u>				
	Harden schools and teacher training***	71	78.9%	21.1%
	Legislating discrimination***	31	77.4%	22.6%
	Favors the marshal program*	22	63.6%	36.4%
<u>General</u>				
	Constitutional rights	84	47.6%	52.4%
	Founding fathers wanted us to be able to fight govt**	20	20.0%	80.0%
	Individuals have a right to protect themselves	17	52.9%	47.1%
	Things more deadly than guns	15	40.0%	60.0%
	NRA does good work	15	33.3%	66.7%
	Hunting**	5	100.0%	0.0%
	Gun control leads to fascism**	5	100.0%	0.0%
<u>Other</u>				
	Shooter discussed***	22	77.3%	22.7%

\*More than one frame could appear in content. Total number of stories/editorials = 754. Pearson Chi-Square test (two tailed) \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .00$ . If there were less than 30 cases, a Fishers Exact test was used to check the results.

### Individual claimsmaking in emails

Scott received 4,962 emails regarding SB 7026. Of these, 4,093 urged Scott to sign the bill into law and 869 urged him to veto the bill outright. The vast majority of emails supporting SB 7026 (88.7%) were associated with an email campaign sponsored by Everytown. As previously discussed, Everytown threw its public support behind the Never Again movement and, once the legislature passed a bill, alerted Florida members that a bill that could reduce gun violence in the state was headed to Scott's desk. The email, which was sent by 3,630 different accounts amplified frames that were resonant with

its organizational priorities, and the most likely to elicit action from its supporters, and excluded those that did not. The email did not mention hardening schools or the marshal program, nor did it ask Scott to veto these aspects of the bill. It read:

As a Florida resident concerned with gun violence in our state, I urge you to sign SB 7026, a gun reform bill, into law. The provisions in the bill that include Risk Protection Orders and raising the minimum age to purchase a gun to 21 could have stopped the Parkland high school shooter . . . . And it includes common sense gun violence prevention policies like a prohibition on selling and possessing bump stocks . . . . Please take action immediately and sign this bill to better protect Florida's public safety and reduce gun violence.

Only 11.3% of the emails included some criticism of the legislation. Nearly all of these emails urged Scott to veto the marshal plan, arguing that the focus should be on 'hardening' schools instead of putting more guns in schools.

The 869 emails sent to Scott opposing the bill were more varied in their content. This is, in part, because only 49% of the emails opposing the bill were associated with campaigns spearheaded by gun rights groups. The three most prominent campaigns were organized by Hammer. As the Florida House and Senate debated legislation, Hammer urged gun rights supporters to contact their representatives and ask them to vote against the bills because they denied 'civil rights' to young adults and 'criminalized' bump stock ownership. The email, which was sent to Scott 97 times, argued, 'These bills will do nothing to make Floridians safer and will make felons out of otherwise law abiding productive citizens.'

Once SB 7026 passed, Hammer called on supporters to pressure Scott to veto the bill. She launched two campaigns simultaneously. First, she made a direct appeal through the sympathetic media outlet *Ammoland*. She informed supporters that the Florida House voted to pass 'an unconstitutional bill that violates Second Amendment rights and punishes law-abiding citizens for the actions of a mentally ill teenager who murdered 17 people after Florida officials repeatedly refused to get him the help he needed.' She urged supporters to contact Scott and tell him to, '*Do The Right Thing: VETO SB-7026 and make the Legislature stop the bullying, the emotionalism and the political posturing and draft a bill that focuses on making our schools safe. IN THE SUBJECT LINE PUT: VETO SB-7026 – Do The Right Thing.*' This subject line appeared in 166 emails, and dozens of individuals simply copied the subject line or Hammer's suggested text into the body of the email. Hammer also called on gun rights leaders to spread the word about the bill, and ask their supporters to call/email Scott. For example, in a Facebook post James Yeager, who runs a tactical training center a gun shop in Tennessee and a YouTube channel with 95.4K subscribers, shared Hammer's call to action and urged supporters to ask Scott to 'Please veto SB-7026 so the Legislature can pass it without the unconstitutional anti-gun provisions.' 123 emails included this language.

Other gun rights groups organized campaigns as well. Like Hammer, the NRA urged supporters to contact Scott and ask him to veto the bill because 'taking away gun rights from law abiding citizens and 18–20 year old people is not the answer.' This email appeared 25 times in the sample. Campaigns spearheaded by the groups Florida Gun Rights (sent 10 times) and Firearms Policy Coalition (sent 5 times) argued that the 'horrible' legislation was the result of combining pro- and anti-gun bills in ways that ultimately 'compromised' second amendment rights. They focused on the prohibition of

bump stocks, echoing one of Hammer’s messages that the new law would create ‘hundreds if not thousands of INSTANT FELONS!’ Likewise, a petition posted on Change.org, which was signed by 250 individuals and forwarded to Scott, asked him to line-item veto the text in the bill outlawing bump stocks.

Even individuals who were not clearly responding to gun rights groups’ calls to action articulated several movement frames in their emails at relatively high rates.<sup>10</sup> Individuals agreed that the proposed legislation was an attack on the Constitution (mentioned in 40.6% of the 443 non-movement emails), criminalized lawful gun owners (34.8%), discriminated against 18–20 year olds (20.1%), and failed to put the blame for the shooting where it was due – on law enforcement (31.4%). Individuals also argued that the shooting reflected failures by the school system to protect children. This, emailers suggested, meant that SB 7026 was ‘pointless,’ and a ‘politician’s solution that solves nothing.’

In short, we find additional support that frame amplification may influence individual claimsmaking. Here, Everytown selectively amplified some of the frames associated with SB 7026 in order to mobilize support for its passage, and, arguably, did so with relative success. Additionally, we find that shifts in framing dynamics may influence individual claimsmaking. Other gun rights groups amplified Hammer’s frames regarding SB 7026’s criminalization of gun owners, potentially sharpening focus on this aspect of the bill.

**Individual claimsmaking on Twitter**

Table 3 summarizes the most mentioned frames in 500 randomly sampled tweets relative to gun control. The patterns on Twitter are similar to those of individual claimsmaking in editorial content. Individuals discussed Parkland in a total of 34.2% of the tweets, and many of these expressed support for the Parkland students and teachers (20%) and called for common sense gun regulation (13.8%). Parkland students received praise on Twitter, and were thanked for ‘speaking out’ about gun control. A fair number of individuals urged others to take action to support gun control and/or to participate in a March for Our Lives event (13.6%).

Individuals directed a fair amount of ire at the NRA (16%). The NRA was tagged in 8.1% of the tweets and roundly criticized for being ‘pathetic,’ ‘a terrorist organization,’ and an ‘American CANCER that needs to be cut out.’ Others, attacked the NRA’s leadership. NRA spokesperson Dana Loesch was called a ‘loser,’ a ‘Nazi,’ a ‘cockroach,’ an ‘idiot,’ and a ‘soulless shill.’ Hammer also received negative mentions with one user calling her a ‘despicable, bloodthirsty ghoul.’ Although there was no shortage of tweets that insulted the intelligence and priorities of gun rights proponents more generally (11.6%), the focus on the NRA was, in part, fueled by ThinkProgress’s efforts to force companies to cut ties with the group. Users publicly thanked companies that ended NRA member discount programs, and gave ‘shout outs’ to companies, such as Dick’s, that had altered their gun-sale policies (8.8%). Individuals also criticized the GOP with users linking republicans’ lack of action to campaign donations made by the NRA (9.0%). Marco Rubio (R-FL), the Florida Republican Party, and Scott were called names and criticized for taking money from the NRA, or, as one individual put it, ‘valuing \$\$\$ over people.’ In short, we find that, once again, frame amplification seems to shape individuals

**Table 3.** Most Mentioned Frames in Gun Control Tweets\*.

<b>Gun Control</b>	
Common sense regulation needed	13.8%
Not all guns are protected	4.0%
Gun violence is a social problem	1.8%
Gun rights is about racism	1.6%
Ban assault rifles	1.6%
<b>Movement</b>	
Take action	13.6%
Support companies championing gun control	8.8%
<b>Politics</b>	
Anti-NRA	16.0%
Anti-Republican	9.0%
Anti-Trump	4.0%
Pro-Democrats	2.2%
Trump triggers gun owners	1.6%
<b>Parkland</b>	
Support for Parkland students	20.0%
Another shooting	3.2%
<b>Other</b>	
Negative comments about gun rights supporters	11.6%
News storey shared	3.0%
Neutral comment to another user	1.8%
Gun owners are violent	1.2%

\*More than one frame could appear in a tweet. Total number of gun control tweets sampled is 500.

claimsmaking. Individuals included movement frames in their claimsmaking relatively frequently.

This is not true of gun rights. Table 4 summarizes the frames mentioned by gun rights supporters in 500 randomly chosen tweets. Here, we see that individuals rarely discussed the shooting or gun control legislation. Individuals occasionally made negative comments about Hogg and González (1.8%) and called for the ousting of Sheriff Israel due to his ‘botched’ response to the shooting (1.4%). Most of the tweets simply shared news stories with hashtags (29.6%) or promoted products that might appeal to gun rights supporters such as clothing, accessories, YouTube videos and group newsletters (26.4%). When individuals did discuss gun rights, movement groups were at the center of the conversation. Proponents focused on the ‘deranged liberal effort’ to undercut support for the NRA.

Some of this was fueled by the NRA. On February 24th, the organization issued a press release criticizing the companies who had severed their relationship with the NRA in ‘an effort to punish our members who ... live in every American community.’<sup>11</sup> Dana Loesch and NRA president Wayne Pierre called on members to show their solidarity with the group by renewing their memberships and sharing their actions with others via social media. Additionally, the group called on its members to publicly thank the companies that hadn’t ‘caved to liberals’ ‘for standing with the @NRA and the millions of Americans who support #2a rights.’ A fair number of individuals responded to these calls to action (12.4%), sharing pictures of their NRA membership cards, circulating the NRA’s note of thanks, and criticizing Dick’s decision to quit selling AR-15s. Individuals pledged to take their business elsewhere, and sarcastically wondered if the next step would be to define ‘knives and golf clubs’ as ‘assault weapons’ and ban them too.

**Table 4.** Most Mentioned Frames in Gun Rights Tweets\*.

<b>Parkland Related</b>	
Negative comments about Parkland teens	1.8%
Negative comments about Parkland response	1.4%
<b>Reactions to Corporations</b>	
Pro-gun action	12.4%
<b>Reactions to Opponents</b>	
Negative comments about liberals	2.0%
Negative comments about gun control advocates	2.0%
Negative comments about democrats	2.0%
<b>Reactions to Allies</b>	
Anti-Trump Action	4.8%
Pro-NRA	4.4%
Pro-Trump	4.0%
<b>Gun Rights Arguments</b>	
Pro-gun rights	7.6%
Attack on 2a = attack on the Constitution/Democracy	3.4%
<b>Other</b>	
Sharing news content	29.6%
Promotional materials	26.4%

\*More than one frame could appear in a tweet. N = 500.

## Conclusion

This paper explores the potential influence of political actors and framing dynamics on individual claimsmaking across different forums. We find that two framing dynamics – competition and amplification – seem to shape the relative visibility of these frames in mainstream outlets and the frequency with which individuals use these frames in their own claimsmaking. Amplification appears to reduce the number of frames political actors champion publicly and increase their visibility in mainstream news. This, in turn, may increase the visibility of these frames for the broader public as well as the frequency with which individuals use these frames in their claimsmaking across forums – even forums with very different affordances. Competition, in contrast, seems to increase the number of frames political actors champion, potentially decreasing the amount of media attention a given idea receives and its likelihood of appearing in individual claimsmaking.

Additionally, we find that political actors strategically amplify the frames of their allies and opponents. Specifically, we find that amplification may vary by forum and over time. Organizations supporting gun control choose to amplify some frames in select forums, seemingly with the intent of mobilizing anti-NRA sentiment and broader support for gun control legislation. ThinkProgress took up the Never Again movement's anti-NRA calls on social media, and threatened to boycott companies supporting the gun rights group. Similarly, Everytown selectively amplified the aspects of SB 7026 that would resonate with its members and urged them to share their support for the bill with Scott. Likewise, we find that framing dynamics can change abruptly, particularly when political losses are imminent. Gun rights groups critical of Hammer and the NRA quickly amplified concerns over criminalizing bump stock ownership as SB 7026 headed to Scott's desk. Given the relatively low rate of non-movement emails outside of Hammer's campaigns, however, more research should explore how the timing of amplification affects the likelihood a frame will get picked up by individuals.



More research is needed on how political actors affect individual claimsmaking in dynamic political and media systems. Since we only studied one case, it is unclear what kinds of political conditions might give political actors, including social movements, an advantage in terms of both influencing individual claimsmaking and affecting change. It would be interesting to compare these results to emails, tweets, news coverage and editorial content in the wake of the Pulse shooting, which also occurred in Florida but did not result in legislative change. Likewise, we need to better understand feedback loops, or how political actors alter their frames in response to individual claimsmaking on digital forums. Recent research finds that politicians use social media discourse to ‘take the temperature of the room’ (McGregor, 2020) and adjust their messages accordingly. This suggests that, while political actors amplify ideas, they also take cues from online conversations, meaning individual claimsmaking likely plays a role in competition and amplification. Such a study would help explain the consistent patterns with which amplified frames appear in claimsmaking across different forums with diverse affordances and shed additional light on the role of everyday users in amplifying the polemics animating political discourse globally.

## Notes

1. The bill may be found on The Florida Senate website at <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2018/07026>.
2. To be considered a frame or a relevant actor a code/actor had to appear at least five times in the data set.
3. If a subject line or more than two sentences of the written text was the same for at least three emails, the lead researcher searched for the text online to see if it was associated with some sort of collective effort.
4. We monitored key words instead of hashtags so that we would capture all the tweets using terms that were either specific to the Parkland case and legislation or to gun control and gun rights debates more generally.
5. We have coded over 6,500 tweets in the sample. Since we coded the 5,682 tweets using gun rights keywords/hashtags, we were able to compare our coding from the random sample to larger data set. They are remarkably similar, which is why we deemed 500 relevant tweets an appropriate sample.
6. A list of citations relative to this section are included in the Supplementary Materials.
7. Table provided in the Supplementary Materials.
8. Additional tables are available in the Supplementary Materials.
9. We also conducted a risk analysis to assess the odds of a frame’s appearance in editorial content. The results did not change. However, given the low frequency of some of the frames in the sample, we present the chi square results here.
10. Individuals also made several novel claims in their emails. The most frequent reminded Scott that they were Florida gun owners (10.6% of emails), who would vote against him in the future if he didn’t veto the bill (16.3% of emails). Table provided in Supplementary Material.
11. The press release can be viewed here: <https://twitter.com/thisweekabc/status/967517805741596673>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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