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Framing, Media Attribution of Blame, and Negativity in Newspaper Coverage of Failing Public Schools: Evidence and Implications for Policy

by

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Introduction

This paper examines the connection between news media frames, media attribution of blame, and negativity in newspaper coverage of failing public schools. In this study, “failing public schools” is a catchall term used to describe not only failing schools themselves, but also other failures on the individual or school system level that might affect educational outcomes, including policy shortcomings. Examining newspaper coverage of these issues is important, because while extensive research has been conducted into television news frames (Iyengar, 1990) and newspaper framing of specific politicized events or issues, little is known about framing that accompanies education news stories. Previous studies have shown that through framing, the media may provide explanations for people seeking information about an issue, thereby taking ownership of the social construction of problems and influencing how audiences attribute responsibility (Gailey and Lee, 2005).

Framing effects on an audience are undoubtedly important and influential. Social issues such as poverty and crime have been the frequent topic of studies concerning news media framing (Gilens, 1996) yet education is an issue that has been studied far less. Overseen by both national and state government actors, subject to various jurisdictions, and frequently changing to better suit the needs of its citizens, education is a topic that most Americans find universally important, and yet increasingly divisive.

The complexities of the issue of education may have resulted in the topic being relegated to the sidelines in framing research. Due to the current lack of research addressing media effects on education issues, additional research in this area is crucial. This specific study adds to the existing literature on framing in education news stories by examining attribution of blame and negativity in news stories of state and national failings in K-12 public schools found in the

Houston Chronicle, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Furthermore, at the conclusion of this proposal, the discussion will explore some of the implications for education policy outcomes.

Literature Review

Framing: An overview

Frames in television news broadcasts can be classified as “episodic” or “thematic” (Iyengar, 1990). Episodic frames characterize news coverage centered on the personal experiences of an individual or group, allowing a viewer to relate understanding of an issue to the person embodying that idea (Iyengar, 1990). Thematic frames, on the other hand, are often impersonal and detached, placing the story in a larger societal context. An example of an education news story with a thematic frame would be one that gave attention to long-term disparities and funding decisions that resulted in inferior outcomes for students, rather than a story simply focused on a “timely, often controversial, hot button issue” (FrameWorks 2010, p. 32).

Episodic frames are more much more prevalent than thematic frames in television news broadcasts, and Iyengar explains this finding by stating that “constraints of time, advertising, and professional ethics explain why most television news reports focus on concrete acts and breaking events” (1991, p. 14). It has been shown that the way people think about an issue is related to the way an issue is framed (Iyengar, 1990). News frames present “policy images” for viewers, and shape their understanding of an issue (Baumgartner and Jones, 1996). Episodic frames tend to elicit individualistic attributions of responsibility rather than societal attributions.

Consequently, if an issue is presented in an episodic way without context—such as a depiction of

poverty focusing only on the trials of a young African American family— public misperceptions may reinforce existing biases and stereotypes (Gilens, 1996).

Media Attribution of Blame

Episodic framing leads to “attributions of responsibility to individual victims or perpetrators rather than to broad societal forces” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 16). Blame attribution refers to whom or what individuals hold responsible for a specific event (Arceneaux, 2003). Through the media’s use of episodic framing, those actors whom the American public believes are to blame for a problem may shift if the story focuses on the shortcomings of specific officials and their lack of capacity to solve a problem (Iyengar, 1990). Voters may be more likely to support policies that sanction those held accountable in news stories that are episodically framed. For example, a person who views a story about drug use that focuses on one man’s plight may be more likely to favor policies punishing the drug abuser depicted on the news than a policy that sought to address the underlying societal causes of drug abuse.

Arceneaux’s 2003 study examining the conditional impact of blame attribution on economic voting found that “those who blame the government for the state of the economy are more likely to view their economic situation in political terms and vote, whereas those who do not view the government as responsible for the economy are less likely to vote as their financial situation worsens” (p. 73). It is clear that significant policy implications exist when blame attribution is considered in the context of a democracy. The media’s tendency to focus on the bad behaviors of a few important actors may affect the public’s perceptions of political candidates and leaders, and influence who is held accountable at election time (Dunaway, 2011).

Negativity in News Coverage

Episodic frames may also hold consequences for the tone of a news story. Blame attribution is often found in news stories with episodic coverage because quotes from sources featuring blame adhere to the routines of modern news media, in which stories are characterized by personalization and dramatization (Bennett, 2009). Negativity is common in stories with blame attribution, and serves as a powerful tool due to its ability to diminish the public's trust in government. This negativity is propagated further by the 'critical journalism' emerging from the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War that remains prevalent today, in which journalists concentrate on blunders in political strategy and mistakes in governing (Lengauer et al, 2011).

These norms of the modern news media have contributed to the increased prevalence of negativity in campaign news (Dunaway, 2011). Dunaway (2011) notes that individualistic (episodic) portrayals of irresponsible politicians are intended to highlight the unique and unusual aspects of a story, capturing the audience's attention. However, such coverage "affects the public's perceptions of current leaders and candidates," disillusioning the public's trust in government (p. 5). Viewers of episodic coverage tend to hold the people at the center of news stories responsible for the problems and conflicts that surround them. Therefore, the effect of blame attribution on the tone of the stories analyzed in this study should not be ignored. This topic will be explored in further detail in the methods section.

Framing and Education News Coverage

Due to what is known about the influence that framing can have on attribution of blame and negativity, it is important to study the effects of framing in news coverage of public education. Understanding the implications of these effects for education policy is an important topic of future research.

Past research has shown that education coverage is much more likely to be found in newspapers, rather than on television. Additionally, education news stories are typically centered on coverage of local events and debates (Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA), 2009). In Iyengar's book, "Is Anyone Responsible?" he states that, "deficiencies in public education do not typically manifest themselves as specific events, and (television) stories on these issues are infrequent" (1991, p. 141). While it is true that many newspaper stories dealing with education issues in public schools provide context, the small amount of recent research on the topic indicates that in fact, today's education news coverage is either primarily episodic or is split amongst the two frames (CMPA, 2009).

As the norms and routines of the modern news media have shifted to meet the demands of increasing profit margins (Dunaway, 2011), many newspaper stories of education reform in which failing public schools are addressed have focused on "episodic presentations of school reforms focused on the impact upon, or discussions within, a single school or school system without tying those issues to broader trends in education reform across the country" (CMPA, 2009, p. 4). Typically, those newspapers employing the highest percentage of thematic news coverage of education issues are newspapers with a national audience such as the *Wall Street Journal*, in which there are specific reasons for the more contextualized coverage. For example, the *Journal* does not cover local events, and therefore many of its stories and opinion pieces reflected the state of education in the nation as a whole.

A 2010 study examined 12 months of newspaper reporting on education in Mississippi, and found that 71 percent of the articles studied treated education issues episodically (Johansen, 2010). In contrast, two separate studies in 2009 examining newspaper coverage of education reform found that the occurrence of episodic and thematic framing was fairly split in coverage

(Manuel, 2009). The findings in Manuel's study (2009) provide examples of episodic education news coverage, including stories in which standardized test results were often used as evidence for the "success" or "failings" of schools. Furthermore, the same newspaper's construction of teachers as 'obstacles to learning' is an example of the media attributing blame to an actor in a story. While Manuel did find education news stories with a positive tone, they often concerned individual school success stories or charismatic school leaders (Manuel, 2009).

Manuel noted that "education reform was overwhelmingly depicted in the media as a game of political football, rather than as a sincere and empirical search for public solutions to compelling social problems" (Manuel, 2009, p. 6). This finding is supported by Lawrence's (2000) work which shows that policy issues are often reported with a game frame where policy issues and their detractors and supporters are discussed in terms of strategy, winning, and losing (Lawrence, 2000). Manuel's findings also align with Bennett's (2009) research on the personalization news bias, which, like an episodic frame, "obscures the big picture in which daily events take place" (Bennett, 2009, p. 39).

Four news biases that matter

Bennett characterizes news stories that utilize the personalization news bias as those that focus on the personalities of the character or groups involved and disregard the larger institutional picture that may be behind the issue. These stories feature the "human trials, tragedies, and triumphs that sit at the surface" of a story and don't delve any deeper (Bennett, 2009, p. 42). An example of personalization from the news coverage that Manuel studied is the medium's depiction of teachers as an impediment to children's learning. Bennett argues that personalized news coverage presents distortions of power and politics that can lead to consequences for media consumers (2009). If media consumers do not grasp the underlying

causes of a problem, in-depth analysis of issues is often lost. As a result, greater misunderstanding from those reading news stories abounds.

The dramatization news bias as described by Bennett is seen in news coverage when the aspects of stories reported by the media are those that tend to be the most easily dramatized (Bennett, 2009). For example, if an important school board vote is described only in terms of conflict between two board members who hotly contest one another's opinions on the vote, the dramatization bias is at work. Such coverage "emphasizes crisis over continuity, the present over the past or future, and the personalities at their center" (p. 41).

When issues are described in terms of specific events without context added to the depiction of the event, Bennett characterizes this type of bias in news coverage as 'fragmentation.' News coverage infused with the fragmentation bias "comes to us in sketchy, dramatic capsules that make it difficult to see the causes of problems, their historical significance, or the connections across issues" (Bennett, 2009, p. 43).

Finally, the "authority-disorder" bias can be seen in news coverage that is preoccupied with the authorities that are cable of establishing order when a crisis situation occurs. Recently, news broadcasts have begun to shift away from coverage of the authority figures that are able to establish order, and instead have turned coverage toward politicians who fail to solve the problems and leave disorder behind for the public to deal with.

An understanding of all four biases is important for any news consumer. However, special attention should be given in this study to the personalization, dramatization, and fragmentation news biases due to their role in media coverage of education policy issues. Additionally, because these biases increase infotainment in media reporting (Korthagen, 2011), the propensity of education news coverage to be negative in general should be examined as well.

Hypotheses

Adapted from the previous research of Iyengar (1990) and Bennett (2009), I analyzed newspaper articles searching for four news frames. The “personalized news frame” I utilized is adapted from Bennett’s personalization news bias and was treated as the theoretical equivalent of an episodic news frame.

The “political frame” was recorded whenever an education article mentioned a debate or was depicting a political fight between two public officials. While an attack on a candidate’s character or personal suitability for office was coded as a personalized frame, the political frame was coded when a story described an election between opponents, or introduced candidates’ arguments and their opponents’ rebuttals from a debate. This frame was adapted from Bennett’s dramatization news bias (2009), in which “sharply drawn actors are shown at the center of a conflict” (p. 41).

The “policy frame” was coded when a policy is discussed in detail, without mention of the context in which it was placed. Similar to Bennett’s description of the fragmentation bias, stories that utilized the policy frame lacked the information necessary for the reader to connect the information about the policy to how it would affect the population and how it fit into the existing framework of policies that govern education.

Finally, the “policy with context frame” was the theoretical equivalent of a thematic frame, and was meant to capture those stories that gave background detail and information regarding a policy discussed in the article. Typically these articles were longer in length, and provided not only a description of the policy, but also a contextual framework with which to understand the policy.

Given past research, I expect to find that framing and personalization bias in newspaper coverage of failing public schools are related. Though newspaper coverage of policy issues is generally thought to be more substantive than broadcast (Dunaway, 2008), the constraints of modern news media are still likely to affect newspapers and shape their coverage of policy to be sensational, personalized, and episodic—characteristics positively associated with blame attribution.

The political and policy frames used in this study describe news coverage that analyzes issues in an episodic way, downplaying contextual understanding and emphasizing drama. As a result, education news coverage of specific policy issues and political figures framed this way will likely be accompanied by blame attribution (Iyengar, 1990).

I expect to find that:

H₁: Newspaper articles with the personalized, political, or policy frame will likely be accompanied by greater media attribution of blame relative to thematic policy articles.

H₂: The news stories employing use of the personalized frame will have the greatest percent chance of blame being attributed in the story.

Additionally, due to the fact that attribution of responsibility is often tied to emotion (Arceneaux, 2003), and who or what is held responsible for an issue will often dictate the opinions of the public who need to assign punishments to those deemed responsible for problems (Iyengar, 1990), I expect to find that:

H₃: Newspaper articles employing use of blame attribution will likely have a negative overall tone when compared to articles that do not use blame attribution.

Furthermore, because “people are genetically wired to pay close attention to negative news and acquire a news-consuming habit to deviant individuals, ideas, and events,” (Lengauer et. al, 2011, p. 181), I expect to find that:

H₄: The news stories with ‘episodic’ frames—personalized, political, or policy—will be more likely than policy with context stories to have a negative tone.

H₅: If blame attribution is not present, a news story is much more likely to have a positive overall tone.

The various topics discussed in the hypotheses necessitated two models for this analysis. Model 1 analyzes the effect of framing on media attribution of blame, and Model 2 examines the effect of both media attribution of blame and the type of frame on the overall tone in the story.

Data and Methods

To test these hypotheses, education news coverage in the *Houston Chronicle*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *San Diego Union-Tribune* from 2000-2010 was examined. These three papers were selected for their geographic diversity, and for the comparable size of the city each paper serves. Houston, Philadelphia, and San Diego are all among the top 10 most populous cities in the United States, and all three of the newspapers selected are the highest circulated newspaper in their respective cities.

Newspaper articles from the three papers were obtained from the database Access World News, available through the LSU library system. In order to create the proper sample, I used the following search terms to narrow the results: Education Policy, Failing Public Schools, and 2000-2010. Each story from each respective paper was reviewed for validity according to the search terms, and due to the small number of relevant articles returned, each admissible article was analyzed for the study.

The *Houston Chronicle* returned 143 articles according to the search terms, and 117 were deemed admissible for the final sample. The *Philadelphia Inquirer's* final sample of 147 articles was selected from 215 returned from the original search. Finally, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* search returned 141 articles, and 102 were used for the final sample. A coding scheme was developed to record various items of research interest¹ and the relevant variables pertaining to this paper are discussed below.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in Model 1 is an indicator for whether or not the article contained any blame attribution within the education content discussed. The unit of analysis is a news story. Each news story was given a value of “1” if blame was attributed in the news story and a “0” if no blame was present. While any blame attributed by an author of a news story was recorded, “media attribution of blame” is not meant to imply that blame had to come from the newspaper’s staff to be relevant to this study. Blame attributed by any actor within a story, quoted or paraphrased, would be entered as a “1” value when coding.

In Model 2, tone is the three-category dependent variable examined. ‘Tone in coverage’ refers only to the overall tone in the news story. Coding of the overall tone in this study reflects Lengauer et. al’s (2011) discussion of negative tonality in a story, in which “individual evaluations of candidates and parties may be diverse within one report, but the overall tone abstracts from the actor-related details and reflects the summary picture” (p. 183). Overall tone was coded along a continuum, in which a “1” was negative, a “2” was assigned to those stories with a neutral tone, and a “3” was given to stories with a positive tone.

Independent Variables

One purpose of this study is to try and understand when blame is attributed in news

¹ See coding scheme attached

stories with regard to policy outcomes. A key variable of interest in this study is the type of news story frame used. To create this variable, each news story was coded as to the frame used: 1) personalized, 2) political, 3) policy, and 4) policy with context. In order to ascertain how and whether each type of frame influenced the probability of blame attribution, each frame question was coded into four different dichotomous variables indicating the presence of each particular type of frame. The indicators for the personalization frame, the political frame, and the policy frame were all included in the model as independent variables of interest, with the indicator for the policy with context frame serving as the omitted category.

The fourth independent variable controlled for the main focus of the news story. Here the categories were teacher issues, testing issues, charter schools, accountability/standards, school vouchers, education/proposed policy, government action, funding/school finance, other, and none. The fact that certain story types have a higher likelihood of blame being attributed in a news story than others necessitated controlling for the focus of the story. For example, in a story addressing “teacher issues,” it is logical to assume that blame will be attributed toward teachers in that news article.

Similarly, in Model 2 the type of frame used in the news story serves as an independent variable, the policy with context frame served as the omitted category, and focus served as a control variable. An additional independent variable in Model 2 is blame attribution (which served as a dichotomous dependent variable in Model 1), where a “1” was coded for blame present in the story, and a “0” was coded if no blame was present.

Additionally, both models include a control variable for the newspaper each story comes from. Across the three newspapers, geographic, community, and paper-specific characteristics alone may have an effect on the tone in that paper’s coverage of education policy issues. For that

reason, the paper type must be controlled for in order to know that factors specific to a paper aren't responsible for the changes in tone seen with framing and media attribution of blame in the articles.

Results

In Model 1, the dependent variable described is dichotomous, and logistic regression was used to analyze the data. The results from Model 1 are seen below in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Probability of Blame Attribution Found in Education Policy News Articles

	Coefficient (Robust SE)	Min-Max	+1 Std. Dev.
<i>News Frames</i>			
Personalized	.541* (.408)	.08	--
Political	.015 (.447)	.002	--
Policy	.171 (.431)	.02	--
<i>Controls</i>			
Paper	.225 (.180)	.06	.02
Focus	-.119** (.052)	-.16	-.05
Constant	1.628** (.515)	--	--

N 365

Pseudo R² .0245

p<.10*, .05**

Tests are 1-tailed.

Note: Cell entries are multinomial logistic regression coefficients. Policy with context is the excluded category for the news frame dummy variables. The last two columns present the changes in predicted probabilities. The min-max column displays the % change in the dependent variable that occurs with a change in the independent variable from the minimum value to the maximum value while holding all other independent variables constant at their minimum values. The last column shows the % change in probability with an increase in the independent variable's value by one standard deviation while holding all other variables constant at their mean values; this measure is not shown for the dichotomous variables.

The first hypothesis stated that newspaper articles with the personalized, political, or policy frame will likely be accompanied by media attribution of blame. Partially supporting the first hypothesis, the coefficient for the personalized frame variable shows that use of the personalized frame is positively and significantly related to the probability of blame attribution appearing in a news story, albeit at only the .10 level ($b=.541$, $SE=.408$, $p<0.10$).

Recall that each of the frame indicators are relative to the omitted category frame—policy with context, the category here most related to what might normally be thought of as a thematic news frame (Iyengar, 1990). *Table 1* demonstrates that education news stories with a personalized news frame are more likely to include blame attribution, relative to those stories that utilize a policy with context frame.

Contrary to the first hypothesis, Model 1 provides no support for the expectation that the political or policy frames would be accompanied by greater media attribution of blame. As seen in *Table 1*, the coefficient for the political frame is not statistically significant, nor is the coefficient for the policy frame.

Predicted probability estimates are presented for Model 1. The last two columns of *Table 1* present estimates of changes in predicted probability. The column labeled “min-max” displays the percent (%) change in the probability of blame attribution moving from a policy with context frame to each of the other frame indicators while holding all other values constant at their minimum or mean values and reveals the magnitude of their effects.

As shown, a change from a policy with context frame to a personalized frame results in an 8% increase in the probability of blame attribution in news stories. This result supports the second hypothesis that personalized news frames have the greatest percent chance of blame being attributed in the story. The table also demonstrates that a change from a policy with

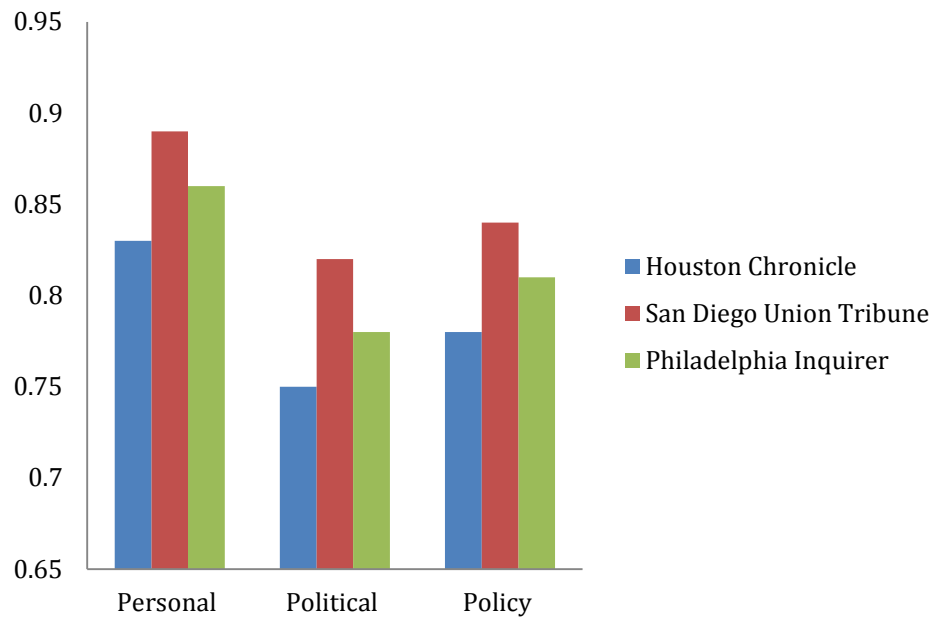
context frame to a more episodic policy frame leads to a 2% increase in the probability of blame attribution.

Table 2 provides the point estimates for the predicted probabilities for the different frames and by the newspaper of publication. Figure 1 illustrates these point estimates graphically.

Table 2: Probability of Blame Attribution in News Story by Frame

Frame	<i>Houston Chronicle</i>	<i>San Diego Union-Tribune</i>	<i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i>
Personal Frame	.83	.89	.86
Political Frame	.75	.82	.78
Policy Frame	.78	.84	.81

Figure 1: Probability of Blame Attribution by News Frame Type



Model 2 relates to the hypotheses regarding tone in education policy coverage. Here, the dependent variable (blame attribution in news stories) from Model 1 is included as a primary variable of interest in Model 2. In addition, the same frame variables and control variables from Model 1 remain in this model. Because Model 2 examines tone in coverage, a three-category variable of negative, neutral, and positive, it is modeled as a multinomial logistic regression model. The results from Model 2 are demonstrated in *Table 3*.

Table 3: Negative and Positive Tone Found in Education Policy News Articles

	Negative Tone			Positive Tone		
	<i>Coefficient</i> <i>(Robust SE)</i>	<i>Min- Max</i>	<i>+1 Std. Dev.</i>	<i>Coefficient</i> <i>(Robust SE)</i>	<i>Min- Max</i>	<i>+1 Std. Dev.</i>
Blame	2.22** (.620)	.29	--	-1.48** (.488)	-.14	--
Personalized	1.99** (.510)	.38	--	.816 (.731)	.008	--
Political	.724 (.725)	.16	--	-1.18 (1.19)	-.04	--
Policy	2.05** (.535)	.42	--	1.21** (.724)	.02	--
<i>Controls</i>						
Paper	.448** (.164)	.16	.05	.374 (.318)	.02	.008
Focus	.005 (.045)	.02	.006	-.118* (.089)	-.06	-.012
Constant	-5.24** (.903)	--	--	-1.91* (1.09)	--	--

N 365

Pseudo R² .1479

p<.10*, .05**

Tests are 1-tailed.

Note: Cell entries are multinomial logistic regression coefficients. Policy with context is the excluded category for the news frame dummy variables. The last two columns present the changes in predicted probabilities. The min-max column displays the % change in the dependent variable that occurs with a change in the independent variable from the minimum value to the maximum value while holding all other independent variables constant at their minimum values. The last column shows the % change in probability with an increase in the independent variable's value by one standard deviation while holding all other variables constant at their mean values; this measure is not shown for the dichotomous variables.

The first three columns in *Table 3* present the coefficients, standard errors and probabilities for the prediction of negative tone relative to neutral tone. Columns 4, 5, and 6 display the coefficients, standard errors and probabilities for positive tone. The baseline category is neutral tone. The first column for *Table 3* shows the coefficient for blame attribution to be positive and significant ($b=2.22$, $SE=0.620$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that blame attribution in news stories significantly increases the probability of a negative tone in news stories, supporting the third hypothesis. The reported change in probability associated with blame attribution suggests a large substantive effect as well. News stories with blame attribution have a 29% higher probability of being negative than stories without.

The coefficient for the personalized frame reveals that use of the personalized frame is positively and significantly related to the probability of a negative tone appearing in a news story ($b=1.99$, $SE=.510$, $p<0.05$). This strongly suggests that personalized frames increase the probability of negatively toned education policy news stories in lieu of neutrally toned stories.

The coefficient for the policy frame is also significant and positively related to the dependent variable ($b=2.05$, $SE=.535$, $p<0.05$). However, the coefficient for the political news frame is not statistically significant. Even without finding support for the political news frame, these results generally support hypothesis four, that news stories with an ‘episodic’ frame are more likely to have a negative tone relative to policy stories with context. A personalized story relative to a policy with context story has a 38% chance of being negative in tone. Similarly, stories that utilize a policy frame have a 42% higher likelihood of being negative relative to policy with context stories.

The last three columns in *Table 3* display the results for predicting positive tone in education policy news stories. As one might expect, blame attribution in news stories is

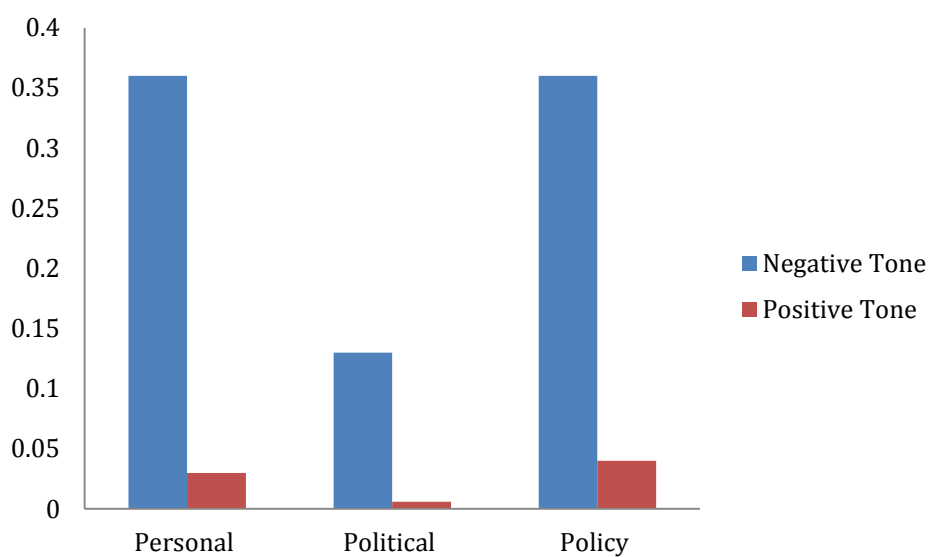
negatively and significantly related to a positive tone in news stories ($b=-1.48$, $SE=.488$, $p<.05$). This finding supports the fifth and final hypothesis. News stories with blame attribution are 14% less likely than those without to be positive in tone.

Neither the personalized nor the political frame is significantly related to positive coverage, and they do not have strong effects. The policy frame is positively and significantly related to positive tone in coverage (suggesting that episodic policy frames are more likely to be positive or negative as opposed to neutral), but the substantive effect is not large, showing that policy frames are 2% more likely than policy with context frames to be positive in tone.

For predicting both negative and positive tone, the control variables yield inconsistent results. The coefficient for the newspaper variable shows that the paper producing the story does significantly influence the probability of negative tone, but it is not significantly related to positive tone. Alternatively, the focus of the story does not appear to significantly influence the likelihood of negative tone, but does significantly influence the probability of positive tone in news stories. *Table 4* and Figure 2 display the point estimates and the associated figures on the next page.

Table 4: Probability of Negative and Positive Tone in News Story by Frame

Frame	Negative	Positive
Personal Frame	.36	.03
Political Frame	.13	.006
Policy Frame	.36	.04

Figure 2: Probability of Tone by News Frame Type

Discussion and Conclusion

The results from this study indicate that the type of frame used in media coverage of failing public schools affects whether blame attribution is present or not present in a story, and that the type of frame and presence of media attribution of blame affect the tone found in education policy articles. However, when examining the models used in this study and the findings and non-findings that resulted from the hypotheses, certain limitations of the study become apparent.

Limitations

In Model 1, the only frame found to significantly affect the presence of media attribution of blame was the personalized frame, and evidence of the frame's significance was less than overwhelming (only significant at the .10 level). It is highly likely that the lack of strong statistical significance for the personalized frame is related to the small sample size used for this study. Standard errors are inflated due to the small sample size, and therefore the likelihood of this study committing a type II error is increased. The effect of the personalized frame on media attribution of blame may very well be present in the population, but the sample the results are drawn from is not large enough to separate out significant effects. In future studies, the sample should be increased so that the personalized frame's effects can be further verified statistically or thrown out.

Other factors may contribute to explaining why the effect of the political and policy specific frames on media attribution of blame may be under-represented. First and foremost, the lack of evidence supporting the political and policy frames reaching significance may be due to a coding decision. In an attempt to differentiate among frames, the two types of frames were

separated out and only one could be selected when coding the story. This was problematic when a story contained both ‘political’ and ‘policy’ coverage.

For example, a story might have the bulk of its focus on a policy specific issue and contain blame attribution, while also including coverage of political debates between candidates containing blame attribution. The coding scheme necessitated choosing one frame that categorized the majority of the coverage, yet both types of frames might have been included in the story and been accompanied by blame attribution. Due to these situations, the magnitude of the effect of a frame on media attribution of blame might appear less intense because its effect is cancelled out or overshadowed by another frame. This is of particular concern for the political and policy frames, as a discussion of a policy-specific issue was often accompanied by political coverage. If a story included both of those frames with media attribution of blame, only one frame was coded, and the effect of the frame not reported was diminished. This problem could be rectified in future studies by creating a dichotomous “0” or “1” variable for the presence or lack of presence of each frame rather than coding only one frame per news story.

Additionally, the newspapers utilized in this study may hold the key to some of the non-findings. While the cities Houston, Philadelphia, and San Diego were all chosen for their similarities in size and newspaper circulation numbers, the large geographic range of the people that comprise these papers’ readership may have consequences for the type of education coverage the paper produces and thus the frames used. For example, perhaps there would be a stronger finding for the political frame’s impact on media attribution of blame in mid-sized cities like Baton Rouge, where debates among officials are given more coverage due to the fact that there are less school districts that necessitate coverage.

Scarcer education coverage of political debates and issues by papers like the *Houston Chronicle* is logical at a time when newspapers are resource starved. Large newspapers may only be able to provide brief overviews of education events and how they fit into the larger picture rather than depicting the immediate thoughts of those affected by the policies. This idea is supported by research that shows that newspapers' coverage of House representatives for their area is less frequent and less in-depth in multi district metro areas when compared to papers whose markets encompass only one House district (Arnold, 2004). In the future, mid-sized newspaper coverage could be included in the sample alongside multi district metro area papers like the *Chronicle* to determine if such coverage would change the results of the study.

A very important limitation of this study is the lack of time or resources to conduct an adequate check for inter-coder reliability. To produce results that can be deemed scientifically sound, this study must incorporate the use of trained coders in the future. Without knowing if the same data would be collected by others familiar with the coding scheme, it is difficult to know whether personal biases or other factors could be influencing the results. In order to make the entire coding process more streamlined in the future, the coding scheme needs to incorporate fewer categories, so that there is less of a chance that the coding scheme's wide variety of options produces a lack of consistent results among those coding the data.

Discussion of Research Contribution

Even after taking the above limitations into account, these findings regarding framing and blame attribution are generally consistent with previous framing research that has demonstrated that presence of an episodic frame is more likely to indicate blame attribution than a thematic frame. By contributing to the limited amount of research as it relates to education, this study

contributes to the field of studies analyzing framing and media attribution of blame in a new context.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the type of frame used does in fact affect the tone of coverage in education news stories. The probability of negativity in tone for each episodic frame—personalized, political, and policy—was much higher than the probability that those stories would be accompanied by a positive tone.

Finally, this study demonstrates that blame attribution is significantly related to the tone of the stories examined in the sample. Blame attribution increases the probability of a negative tone appearing in a news story, and decreases the likelihood of a positive tone appearing in an education newspaper article.

These results are important because negativity in news coverage often serves to disillusion the public's belief that problems can be solved and that the leaders responsible for solving those problems are capable of resolving issues. Since this study demonstrates that the probability of blame attribution accompanying episodic frames is high, newspapers should be cautious of including unnecessary blame attribution in a story, as an abundance of negativity in coverage of education may cause apathy or anger among the public toward these issues.

One additional way that this research adds to the current literature on framing in coverage of education issues is through the inductive coding used in this study. Adapted after the framing research by Iyengar (1991) and information bias research by Bennett (2009), the coding in this study allows the researcher to break down the analysis of framing effects in a more detailed way than lumping results into either a single episodic or thematic category. The ability to analyze stories within a personalized, policy, policy with context, or political frame should help future

researchers to pinpoint which *types* of episodic or thematic frames are most likely to be accompanied by blame attribution.

Suggestions for Future Research

The next steps that will be taken in future research involve examining how the four news frames discussed in this study affect media attribution of blame and negativity in other newspapers that vary from the *Houston Chronicle*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *San Diego Union-Tribune*. As discussed in the limitations section, the sample should be extended even further to include other newspapers. This step is important because newspapers vary in their use of particular frames depending on the specific issues that are relevant to an area. Additionally, examining variation in education news coverage across states, metro areas, and regions of the country would provide additional insight into what other variables can affect the presence of episodic framing, media attribution of blame, and negativity in education news stories.

Researchers may focus on these framing variations as well as which subjects are being targeted for blame in stories covering failures in education from this point forward. An interesting way to fold this research into future projects that examine public opinion is to study the link between newspaper coverage of education policies and public opinion on those issues. For example, a study could look at how those who are blamed for failures in education shifts within newspaper coverage over time, and what the corresponding shift in public opinion is over the same period of time. Turning to election results as a measure of public opinion would allow researchers to detect who the public was holding accountable at the voting booth. If researchers found a concrete connection between an education policy, politician, or school official that was voted out after intense media scrutiny, those findings are important to understand moving

forward. Additionally, examining these findings over time would allow researchers to understand if the media has established any sort of pattern in their coverage of these issues.

Important Implications

Given the known effects that framing has on attribution of blame, there are several important implications of this study to consider regarding education policy outcomes. Consistent findings in future research that a particular frame (such as a personalization frame) is accompanied by blame attribution in stories about teachers, for example, would indicate that the public is likely to criticize teachers for problems in education and hold them accountable for failures when policy decisions are voted on and implemented. Additionally, episodic frames have been shown to reduce citizens' trust in government, (Bennett, 2009) and newspapers continuing to frame education shortcomings in such a way might turn away those who see news coverage and think that problems in education have become enduring and impossible to fix.

Education policy outcomes often have large and tangible effects on the population that is affected by them. Education news coverage and its media effects should be studied extensively, and no longer relegated to the sidelines. The recent proposed education reforms in Louisiana and subsequent protests by teachers demonstrate the high stakes nature of education issues that occur at the state level. Such important policy decisions warrant sufficient coverage, and care should be taken by newspapers to avoid covering all facets of these issues episodically. Episodic coverage that focuses on the drama of the conflict in Louisiana between the governor and teachers—rather than substantive coverage that increases understanding of the implications of education policies—may reduce discussion among the public about important education issues and increase negativity toward those blamed for problems.

More thematic and contextual understanding of the reasons why schools fail could help facilitate greater discourse and knowledge among citizens about the societal reasons behind failures in education. Such a conversation could enable potential policy shortfalls to be avoided, giving credence to the importance of paying attention to the news media's portrayal of education in the news.

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Newspaper Coding Scheme

1. Paper Name (Written in)	5. Focus (Subject of Article) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher Issues 2. Testing Issues 3. Charter Schools 4. Accountability/Standards 5. School Vouchers 6. Education Policy/Proposed Policy 7. Government Action 8. School Finance/Funding for Schools 9. School Choice 10. Failure of school/district/program 11. Other 12. Don't Know/Unclear/None
2. Year (2000-2010) (Written in)	6. Other Focus <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher Issues 2. Testing Issues 3. Charter Schools 4. Accountability/Standards 5. School Vouchers 6. Education Policy/Proposed Policy 7. Government Action 8. School Finance/Funding for Schools 9. School Choice 10. Failure of school/district/program 11. Other 12. Don't Know/Unclear/None
3. Type of Story <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Original News Story 2. Wire News Story (AP, etc.) 3. Op-Ed Piece 4. Letters 5. Editorial 6. Don't Know/List 	7. Blame Attributed in News Article <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
4. Prominence <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Front Page 2. Not Front Page 	8. Main Source of Blame <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Journalist 2. Government Actor (President, Political Candidates, etc.) 3. School Official (Principal, Superintendent, etc.) 4. Parents 5. Teachers 6. School Board/Education Actor 7. Research Firm (Think Tank) 8. Organization 9. Other 10. Don't Know/Unclear/None

Newspaper Coding Scheme

9. Tone of Main Source <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No Overall Tone 2. Negative Tone 3. Positive Tone 4. Balanced Tone 5. Neutral Tone 6. Don't Know/Unclear 	13. Secondary Target of Blame <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers 2. School Officials 3. Students 4. Charter Schools/School Choice 5. Lack of Accountability 6. Lack of Funding for Education 7. School Conditions 8. Socioeconomic Conditions 9. Government Official 10. Specific Education Policy 11. Education Actor 12. Other 13. Don't Know/Unclear/None
10. Secondary Source of Blame <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Journalist 2. Government Actor (President, Political Candidates, etc.) 3. School Official (Principal, Superintendent, etc.) 4. Parents 5. Teachers 6. School Board/Education Actor 7. Research Firm (Think Tank) 8. Organization 9. Other 10. Don't Know/Unclear/None 	14. Overall Tone <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No Overall Tone 2. Negative Tone 3. Positive Tone 4. Balanced Tone 5. Neutral Tone 6. Don't Know/Unclear
11. Tone of Secondary Source <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No Overall Tone 2. Negative Tone 3. Positive Tone 4. Balanced Tone 5. Neutral Tone 6. Don't Know/Unclear 	15. Frame <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personalized 2. Political 3. Policy Specific 4. Policy with Context
12. Target of Blame <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers 2. School Officials 3. Students 4. Charter Schools/School Choice 5. Lack of Accountability 6. Lack of Funding for Education 7. School Conditions 8. Socioeconomic Conditions 9. Government Official 10. Specific Education Policy 11. Education Actor 12. Other 13. Don't Know/Unclear/None 	