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Staying Above the Fray: Framing and Conflict in the Coverage of Education Policy Debates

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This article examines the mass media's role in shaping education policy debates in light of pluralist theory and Bourdieu's social fields theory. We content analyzed the coverage of New Jersey education policy debates during 1985, when the governor moved to consolidate his power in the education field. We used quantitative framing and conflict analysis and found that the media presented educational policy debates in ways that advantaged political and economic elites and portrayed the governor as being above the political fray. On the whole, our findings conform more to Bourdieu's social fields theory than to pluralist theory.

Introduction

Since the 1980s, states have gradually increased their grip on educational policy and school governance (e.g., Carlson 1992; Cooper and Nisonoff 2009).¹ With few exceptions, other stakeholders have rarely been successful in challenging states' ascendancy.² This of course does not mean that states are the only powerful agent in education, or that they can propose and pass any regulation they favor. In fact, the field of educational policy is often described as a battleground between competing social agents. Previous work has focused on prominent social agents like governors, high-level officials from departments of education and higher education, house legislators, courts, district superintendents, teacher unions, teacher educators, business leaders, and parent teacher organizations (PTOs), who vie for power that would allow them to shape the field.

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This article looks at one overlooked agent, the mass media, through the theoretical lenses of pluralist and field theory. Based on a systematic content analysis of education policy coverage in New Jersey, we conclude that the media frames education policy in episodic terms, focusing on particular individuals and events while neglecting structural factors, and features conflict prominently while allowing the governor to remain above the fray. On this basis, we argue that the media's role in education policy contributes to the dominance of the executive branch, potentially distancing the broader public from participation. These findings conform more closely to Bourdieu's theory of fields than to pluralist theory.

We illustrate the important role that mass media plays in struggles over educational policy by revisiting a key battleground, New Jersey, during the 1980s. In 1982, Thomas Kean, a Republican governor, challenged the teacher unions and teacher educators, who used to be a powerful force in shaping education policy at the state level. This led New Jersey to become a pioneer among U.S. states in its approach to education reform. Until now, no systematic study has clarified the media's role in the transformation of power in New Jersey's field of educational policy, though in the past, teacher unions and teacher educators have accused the media of providing unfair coverage of this field (Carlson 1990, 2004).

We argue that analyzing and learning the historical role the mass media played in shaping the debate over educational policy also helps explain how mass media might have contributed to other states aspiring to tightly regulate their schools and teachers. This historical inquiry particularly calls readers' attention to recent debates over teacher quality (e.g., traditional teacher preparation vs. teacher residency programs, Teach for America, and merit pay programs for teachers), which continue to dominate the field of educational policy.

Mass Media and Politics

This article rests on a tripartite theoretical structure consisting of pluralism, field theory, and framing/conflict theories. The following section elaborates

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on the predictions of pluralism and social field theory regarding the media's role in shaping the public dialogue over educational policy debates. We then utilize framing theory and political communication literature more generally to operationalize, test, and discuss the conflicting predictions of pluralism and field theory.

A Pluralistic Approach

A pluralistic democracy thrives when multiple actors who hold different sets of ideas and interests engage in an open debate over the direction of society. According to pluralist theory, democracy is an arena where power is “exercised by, or on behalf of, either the whole of a population or at least a wide range of the population’s sub-groups” (Hicks and Lechner 2005, 55) and inequalities are “noncumulative” (Dahl 1961, 85). Dahl (1961, 256–67) assumed that an independent mass media could contribute significantly to this vision, since ideally it provides political and cultural elites with an “open stage” to propose, debate, and discuss their ideas, while informing and inviting the public to take part in these debates in multiple outlets. Studies of the era suggested that mass and interpersonal communication patterns were dispersed enough to avoid concentrating power in the hands of too few individuals (Katz 1957). A *Los Angeles Times* national opinion poll from 1985 (the period discussed in this article) seems to suggest that many U.S. citizens viewed the media as an honest broker.³ So, while the public seemed relatively confident and comfortable with what the news media provides, the key question is to what extent the media’s image was anchored in reality.

A Field Theory Approach

An alternative model that theorizes the struggle over educational policy in New Jersey can be found in Bourdieu’s work on social fields. Based on this line of work, we argue that educational policy in New Jersey should be understood as a contentious political and ideological struggle among social agents (groups, individuals, and institutions) who possess different sources and volumes of capital, have different stakes in the field, and occupy different positions in the social space (Bourdieu 1985). Generally, once a serious challenge to the doxa arises, the field of educational policy (as any other field) becomes divided into competing worldviews. On the one hand are those whose hegemonic views used to be taken for granted and are challenged—the orthodoxy, which in the case of New Jersey consisted of teacher educators, teacher unions, and other social agents aligned along a loose set of ideas and the institutional

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rewards attached to them. On the other hand, there is the heterodoxy, which is represented by the views of social agents who are deeply concerned with the current situation and seek fundamental changes to bring the field back to its “glamorous [imagined] past” (Bourdieu 2005b; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Wilson and Tamir 2008). These social agents were primarily the newly elected and appointed state officials,⁴ backed by the higher education establishment (the New Jersey Department of Higher Education and university presidents) and Republican legislatures (many business and corporate leaders later joined this coalition) (Tamir 2010).

What is the role of the mass media in these political struggles? Mass media, according to Bourdieu (2005a, 2005c), plays an active role in supporting the excessive power held by the economic and political elites. Media embraces the symbolic capital held by the state and corporate sector and tends to accept these agents’ opinions as a legitimate objective standpoint, while marginalizing the ideas voiced by professionals and intellectuals. Many analysts of the relationship between the press and political institutions support this position. These analysts contend that mass media outlets often “index” their coverage to official sources’ viewpoints (Bennett 1990; see also Bagdikian 2000; Hall et al. 1978, 59; Hallin 1986) and sideline alternative actors from outside the establishment (Gitlin 1980). Although, when elites are in disagreement, they can exercise relative autonomy (Hallin 1986). The limited body of work on media coverage of education policy debates also suggests that media favors elite interests (e.g., Fairclough 2000; Fleming-Rife and Proffitt 2004; Thomas 2003).

Framing

In this study, we use framing theory and the literature on conflict in political media to operationalize the role of the media in the public dialogue over educational policy. Cognitive theories of media influence—foremost among them agenda setting (McCombs and Shaw 1972), priming (e.g., Valentino 2002), and framing (e.g., Entman 1993; Scheufele 1999)—investigate the media’s capacity to shape people’s perceptions of the environment they live in through the provision of “information, agendas, and ‘public space’” (to borrow a phrase from Katz [1987, 528]). Specifically, framing looks at how media shapes the way public issues are presented (e.g., Entman 1993; Gitlin 1980). Media frames select “some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, 52). Framing theory argues that influence flows from a powerful media allied with other powerful institutions to a less powerful

audience, and is thus consonant with the hierarchical nature of social fields (Bourdieu 1985).

Studies have found that exposure to specific frames can influence responsibility attributions (Iyengar 1991), the type of considerations taken into account when making a political decision, the robustness of attitudes, and trust in government, and sometimes can directly shape attitudes themselves (e.g., Valentino et al. 2001; see Kinder [2003, 358–61] for a succinct overview of framing effects).⁵

The notion of thematic and episodic news frames (Iyengar 1991) is central to this study. “The episodic news frame takes the form of a case-study or event-oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances . . . the thematic frame, by contrast, places public issues in some more general or abstract context” (14). American and French newspaper coverage of corporate scandals is more episodic than thematic, although cultural and genre-related differences do exist (Davidson 2007). Exposure to thematic frames as opposed to episodic frames has distinct outcomes in terms of attribution-making. Thematic frames drive the audience to attribute responsibility for social problems to institutional actors (e.g., governmental actors, professional groups, unions) and to conflicts over interests and power, while episodic frames focus on specific “juicy” examples to illustrate a larger problem, frequently leading the audience to blame individuals for social ills (Iyengar 1991) (e.g., a bright young graduate of Princeton University wants to teach in a poor urban school in Jersey City, but must attend a mediocre college of education program to work toward his teaching certificate before he can pursue his passion). By focusing on such individual actors or instances, episodic frames serve to insulate powerful political actors from the public and thus help cement the dominant position of these actors.

In this study, we examine framing both in general and by social agent. In general, we hypothesize that the media will tend to frame education policy debates episodically, as has been found previously with other social issues. We have less firm expectations regarding whether different actors and different policies originating in these different actors will be framed divergently. Our analysis will therefore be more exploratory and post-hoc.

Conflict in the News

In his essay “The Dark Continent of American Journalism” James Carey (1986) argued that American journalists explain public events using personal motives instead of painting a more complex causal picture of what produces certain social, economic, or political outcomes. Americans “assume that individuals are authors of their own acts, that individuals do what they do

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intentionally, they say what they say because they have purposes in mind” (180). In addition, Carey (1986) argued that the commercial orientation of most American journalism, together with organizational pressures to rapidly produce a constant stream of packaged information, also contribute to this focus on individuals.

This emphasis on individuals is often transformed into a focus on conflict between individuals, as has been amply demonstrated in American political news (e.g., horse race coverage), and this can have an important impact on the public—an impact that we consider in the conclusion to this article (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1994). Therefore, we also hypothesize that education policy coverage will be dominated by conflict.

The literature, however, suggests that not all actors are presented as conflict-ridden to the same extent. Subaltern social movements are often portrayed as suffering from organizational and ideological schisms. In fact, there is some evidence that the media can cultivate organizational conflict where none previously existed (Douglas 1994; Gitlin 1980). However, institutional sources, especially those with executive power, can command more respect from the news and be portrayed as more cohesive and above the political fray. This is because they have significant resources and authority—for example, the capacity to produce press releases or hold newsworthy events—with which to subsidize news coverage (Gans 2003, 50–51).

The highest-placed government official in any democratic political system normally heads the executive branch. In an American state, it is the governor. At the federal level, it is the president. Historically, the president has had to bargain with other political actors to promote his agenda, thus conforming to the pluralist view of American politics. However, the increasing reach of the media has enabled presidents to “go public” and appeal to the people through the media to put pressure on other political actors, often by presenting parts of their policy agenda authoritatively (Kernell 1997).⁶

In the realm of state education politics, a state governor should enjoy a similar capacity for going public and with it a lower probability of being presented as engaged in conflict. In contrast, governmental actors assisting the governor, as well as legislators, unions, and educator organizations, would suffer from the same disadvantages as nationwide social movements. Thus, other actors would be presented as embroiled in intraorganizational disputes as well as interinstitutional conflict with other actors. By extension, we hypothesize that policies promoted by more powerful actors are likely to be portrayed in the media in less conflictual terms than other policies (even if they encountered stiff opposition in reality). (See table 1 for theories and hypotheses.)

TABLE 1

Theory and Hypotheses

	Pluralism	Field Theory
Conflict—conceptualization	All agents are engaged in constant conflict in roughly equal and shifting coalitions	Some agents enjoy a dominant position and as a result distance themselves from conflict by equating themselves with the public interest
Conflict—operationalization	Agents should be portrayed in equal measures as engaged in conflict	Dominant agents are not portrayed as engaged in conflict; they are presented as appealing directly to the public circumventing other agents
Framing—conceptualization	Various sections of the broader public participate from time to time and have significant effect on the policy arena; the media helps maintain an open public discussion	The policy arena is dominated by political and economic elites who use their power to get advantages in the game, and by the field of mass media, which largely adopts these mainstream perspectives; the public is a bystander
Framing—operationalization	Thematic framing enhances the capacity of the public to comprehend and engage in policy debates and therefore participate in a pluralist democracy; we would therefore expect the reporting to be dominantly thematic	In its focus on individual actors and events, episodic framing does not provide a coherent picture of the policy arena but rather narrows the discussion and helps reproduce interests held by the powerful economic and political elites; we would therefore expect the reporting to be dominantly episodic

New Jersey's Politics of Education during the 1980s

During the 1980s, the U.S. political landscape experienced dramatic transformation with the rise of Ronald Reagan and his administration's push for the application of neoconservative and neoliberal ideas (see Harvey [2005] on neoliberalism generally; see Apple [2001, 2003] and Hursh [2007] for a discussion about neoliberalism and educational policy in the United States). Similar political changes occurred at the state level in New Jersey. After Thomas Kean won the gubernatorial elections in New Jersey, the ripple effects of his victory were felt particularly in education, which was a prime focus in his election campaign (Kean 1988; Salmore and Salmore 1993). Responding to growing concerns about teacher professionalism and quality at the national level (e.g., National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983) and at the state level (Cooperman and Klagholz 1985; Klagholz 2000), Kean and his education commissioner, Saul Cooperman, proposed numerous policy initiatives focusing primarily on reshaping the preparation of new teachers and transforming New Jersey's public schools into a more competitive, businesslike model driven by standards, tests, and merit pay.

In proposing these groundbreaking policy initiatives, the state indicated its disillusion and mistrust of the capacity of the traditional patrons of education to introduce viable reform themselves. This development in New Jersey marks a significant change from past practices characterized by a long tradition of a weak central government with relatively little interest in teacher quality. As a result, teacher-quality issues fell de facto under the purview of teacher unions and teacher educators, who constituted what Bourdieu would call the orthodoxy of the education field (see Bourdieu 2005b; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Based on archival analysis and news coverage, Tamir (2006) identified 10 educational policies that were under discussion in 1985 in New Jersey.⁷ Of the 10 policies, we describe the three that have received by far the most attention from educators and policy makers and were most frequently covered in 1985 by the local press.⁸

The Alternative Route Program to Teacher Certification

The first and most intrusive attack by the state on the status quo in education included the proposed state-sponsored alternative route program to teacher certification, which became a national landmark in the relationship between the state and the teacher education establishment. Teacher preparation, Governor Kean and other top officials believed, should not be left in the hands of incompetent teacher educators who had enjoyed a monopoly in the field,

given their poor record. Furthermore, the new administration perceived traditional college preparation programs as an arbitrary hurdle for talented candidates who might have considered moving to teaching, unless required to pay an unreasonably high price in terms of college tuition fees and lost time (Cooperman and Klagholz 1985; Kean 1988).⁹ Foreshadowing arguments that would become increasingly part of the early twenty-first-century educational policy discourse (see, e.g., the debates over Teach for America), they argued that public schools should be able to consider talented candidates from top colleges who have strong subject matter background and high motivation to teach (e.g., Ballou and Podgursky 2000; Hess 2001).

The conflict over this policy was bitter as groups holding very different clusters of ideas collided. On the one hand stood teachers, and especially teacher educators, who believed teacher educators had substantive knowledge regarding teaching methods to impart to prospective teachers before entering the classroom (e.g., Carlson et al. 1983). State officials opposed this argument, asserting instead that the most important component for success in teaching is subject matter knowledge (supplemented by on-the-job training) (Cooperman and Klagholz 1985). To secure acceptance of the state's approach to teacher preparation, Commissioner Cooperman established a number of committees, which led to the development of a 200-hour alternative program to prepare teachers before and during the first year of teaching (Cooperman et al. 1983). Concurrently, as part of the attempts to challenge the teacher preparation programs' monopoly and put alternate route preparation on equal footing, the Department of Education proposed that teacher education programs would not be allowed to provide more than a minor in education consisting of 30 hours of preparation, 10 of which were prescribed to be supervised student teaching (Tamir 2010).

Teachers' Minimum Salary Policy

Under attack for watering down and removing traditional barriers of entry into the profession and anxious about his public image, Kean launched the minimum salary initiative to improve the starting salary of teachers in New Jersey to \$18,500.¹⁰ This policy immediately gained the support of both teacher unions and the house Democratic majority. Opponents of this policy, the house Republican minority, and the New Jersey School Board Association argued that, if passed, this policy would dramatically drive up the cost of education, without proof that it would improve the educational system. No matter what sort of intentions fueled this policy, it proved beneficial for the governor in the short and the long run. In the short run, this policy obscured some aspects of the fierce conflicts that appeared around the alternative route into teaching.

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In the long run, this move proved profitable for Kean because it portrayed him in the eyes of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) as a moderate Republican and someone willing to negotiate and share power (Fulton 2004). This was also, in part, why the NJEA—in an unprecedented move—supported Kean for reelection against a Democratic candidate in the 1985 state gubernatorial elections (Fulton 2004; Tamir 2008).

The Master Teacher Plan

The third major policy, the “master teacher plan,” aimed at introducing a merit-based component to teacher salaries. This struggle over merit-based salaries remains extremely relevant and is fiercely debated today in multiple districts and states.¹¹ The point of contention here was that instead of collective bargaining agreements based on seniority and signed at the district level between local boards and teacher unions, the governor sought to create a new system where teachers would receive salary increases based on their productivity in class.

The master teacher plan took an important place in Governor Kean’s agenda for improving teacher quality (his “blueprint for educational reform”). Nonetheless, this policy encountered fierce opposition from the NJEA, which considered any attempt to introduce merit pay as a critical threat to its unity. Indeed, the battle over the master teacher plan illustrates the wide ideological gap between state officials and union leaders. State officials believed merit-based salaries would significantly enhance teachers’ motivation and outcomes, while union leaders argued that schools are not corporations and children are not commodities in the market. Merit-based salaries, the NJEA argued, would create suspicion and distrust among teachers and between teachers and administrators, and would obliterate any sense of community that helped teachers learn from their mistakes, collaborate with peers, or solicit advice and help when needed.

The ideological gap and the different interests reflected in this policy debate were so pronounced that the union was unwilling to make any concessions. Even when the governor tried to tie the minimum salary bill to a teacher union’s support for a merit-based salary program and agreed to provide the awards as discretionary professional funds to be used by the awardees in school projects instead of being provided as salary increases, NJEA continued to object to the bill.

Union rivalry and ideological differences saved Kean’s proposal temporarily. The New Jersey Federation of Teachers (NJFT), which only represented Newark’s public school teachers, accepted the state’s offer to participate in its experimental program to nominate master teachers. NJFT set procedures and

standards for selecting the master teachers, but these were quickly tainted by allegations that local school committees, which were controlled by the union, disproportionately chose union officials to receive the state grants. Consequently, the Department of Education refused to deliver the awards and placed the policy on hold. The policy became a source of embarrassment and frustration for the governor.

In the sections that follow, we discuss the role mass media played in these debates and how its logic of action (i.e., the way it covers the news in general, and how it frames prominent policy agents and policy proposals in particular) helped shape the public dialogue over educational policy. Before moving to the findings, we first describe the data and methods used in this study.

Method

This study is based on a quantitative content analysis of the coverage of education policy debates in the state of New Jersey.

Sample

The unit of analysis was the single news item. We analyzed an exhaustive sample¹² of all education-related items appearing between January 1 and December 31, 1985, in the Newark *Star-Ledger*. In contrast to a previous framing analysis study of education policy debates that employed a narrative approach (Fleming-Rife and Proffitt 2004), we chose a complementary approach. We systematically applied a coding framework to a body of newspaper content in order to identify generic frames¹³ and the existence of conflict patterns, in general and also in relation to specific agents and policies featured in the coverage. Every news item on education that included a discussion on policy/proposed policy, plans, or thoughts and/or discussed ideas that mention any group or institution related to education policy at the state level was included in the sample.¹⁴ The first author and a research assistant identified the articles from microfilm. To assure reliability of collection, the research assistant and author talked and met regularly to discuss the selection process for the news items. As a rule of thumb, the research assistant was instructed to be as inclusive as possible, minimizing the loss of potential data. In total, 175 news items were collected. Letters to the editor were excluded from the sample.¹⁵

We chose the *Star-Ledger* because it is the biggest and only statewide news organization to consistently cover New Jersey education policy debates. Local television covers education policy intermittently and is difficult to retrieve.

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More national newspapers, such as the neighboring *New York Times*, do not devote significant resources to state-level policy debates occurring out of state unless they have unique national significance. We chose to focus on the year 1985 because it was the governor's last year during his first term in office. As such, this year represents the culmination of the governor's efforts to bring to fruition educational policies he had promoted throughout his tenure, hoping this would strengthen his bid for reelection.

While comprehensive and exhaustive in regard to 1985, our sample does not reflect some of the policy debates affecting the educational policy landscape of New Jersey in other years. If we had embarked on a multiyear analysis we could have found a somewhat different picture. For example, given the dominance and proactive stance of New Jersey's high court on issues of education spending and inequality since the 1970s (see *Abbott v. Burke*), it is likely that the court, as well as activist groups and state legislatures, would have featured more prominently in the news compared to what we found in 1985. This limits our capacity to make overarching historical generalizations regarding the nature of education policy in New Jersey. Instead, this article's contribution is mainly to develop practical conceptual tools to analyze the media's coverage of educational policy. We hope other researchers find this conceptual framework helpful and employ it in future endeavors to uncover historical trends and patterns in how news media shape the public dialogue over key educational policies.

Variables

The variables were drawn in reference to Bourdieu's notion of social field and reflect the range of policy agents and policy proposals that were discussed in the field of educational policy during that time. Most variables related to basic descriptive information: the type of educational policies mentioned, the educational agents appearing in the item, indication whether the item appeared on the front page or not, the writer's identity, and the journalistic genre involved (opinion editorial, feature story, or analysis). Additional variables that required relatively minimal interpretation included identifying the major policy and agent in the item (by the relative space devoted to the policy/agent in the item, and by the number of times it was mentioned).

Next, we coded the prevalence of thematic and episodic framing in each item based on the theoretical definition presented by Iyengar (1991) and elaborated by Davidson (2007) (see App. B). First, the prevalence of both frames was identified paragraph by paragraph and in the headline. Then, each coder made a holistic and projective judgment regarding the dominant overall frame for each item, taking into account multiple factors such as the

dominant frame in the headline and the location of the two types of frames within an item as well as the proportion of each frame by paragraph. Thus, this article can report the proportion of thematic versus episodic paragraphs for each unit as well as the overall dominant frame. Conflict was a dummy variable coded whenever negative treatment of an opinion or actor by another actor was described or when an item that described a situation as conflictual appeared in the headline, subheading, or first three paragraphs of an item.¹⁶

Training and Reliability

Before coding for frame and conflict in the 1985 data set, we coded a number of test items from adjoining years. After sufficient agreement was reached, 20 percent of the main sample was double coded to assess reliability (the remainder of the sample was coded separately and evenly by the two authors). Reliability was moderate to good for frame and conflict. Cohen's (1960) kappa, a measure of agreement that takes chance agreement into account, was .65 for overall frame (82.7 percent simple agreement) and .56 for conflict (82.7 percent simple agreement). The reliability of the proportion of episodic and thematic paragraphs was measured using a paired *t*-test (1.437, $p = .162$) and Pearson moment correlation ($r = .75$, $p < .001$). This indicates that the two coders matched rather closely in their assessment of the proportion of thematic and episodic frames in an article. These figures represent acceptable reliability levels given the projective (latent) nature of these variables (see Potter and Levine-Donnerstein [1999] on projective variables in content analysis).

Results

We start by examining whether the dominant presence of episodic framing in news coverage across many substantive topics is also replicated in this corpus of education policy coverage. A slight majority (57 percent) of the sample is episodic. There was no indication that the framing pattern in front-page stories was any more or less episodic than stories appearing in other parts of the newspaper. Furthermore, stories authored by the newspaper's education editor, which comprised more than a third of the corpus, did not deviate significantly from the overall framing pattern (suggesting that the coverage had an overall consistent tone). Conflict was prevalent in the corpus, with more than 60 percent of the stories including conflictual elements. We continue with a descriptive analysis of the coverage on the three major policies and then move to an aggregate analysis of the players' coverage across multiple education policies.

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TABLE 2

Chi-Square Distribution of Frame and Conflict among the Three Most Covered Educational Policies (Comparisons Are Between the Policy and All Other Policies Combined)

Policy	Frame	Conflict
Alternate route	4.76 (T) (.029)	—
Alternate route (major)	—	—
Minimum salary	—	—
Minimum salary (major)	—	5.79 (C) (.016)
Master teacher plan	19.79 (E) (.000)	8.36 (C) (.004)
Master teacher plan (major)	11.52 (E) (.001)	6.83 (C) (.009)

NOTE.—Findings with a .05 level of significance or below are bolded. Though none exist, findings with significance of .135 or lower would have been highlighted to project possible trends in the data. Findings with higher levels of significance are omitted from the table. E = episodic, T = thematic, C = conflict.

Framing and Conflict Analysis of the Three Major Policies

Our first set of findings focuses on the three major educational policies covered by the Newark *Star-Ledger*. It illustrates how in these contexts the media tends to favor and inflate the symbolic and economic capital held by state officials and economic elites over the power held by cultural elites (particularly those with relatively low cultural and symbolic capital, like teacher educators and unions).¹⁷

The first case is of the alternative route to teacher certification. While this policy was considered during the 1980s among education circles in the United States as an intrusive step taken by the state (see, e.g., the position of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE] Task Force on Teacher Certification [1984] and alternative routes, as published in the *Journal of Teacher Education*), the media seems to have silenced the fierce conflict around this policy. Indeed, as can be seen in table 2, the “alternate route,” which was successfully implemented by the state after a bitter battle between state officials and teacher educators (Carlson et al. 1983; Tamir 2008, 2010), appeared in stories that were framed more than other policies around thematic reasoning ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 4.76, p = .029$) and lack of conflict, creating a somewhat unreal image to the “alternate route” policy, as if it passed with no substantial opposition. Social agents who vehemently opposed these policies, like teacher educators, were given minimal space in the news to argue or bring data that could challenge the state’s perspective (chi-square test confirms this contention, showing that teacher educators who were the prime target of this policy tended to appear in stories featuring “alternate route” [as the main policy] at the same low rate they appeared in other stories). An illustration can be found in the following excerpt taken from an item discussing

the alternate route policy entitled “State Recruits Teachers at Prestigious Colleges”:

State education officials have launched a campaign to recruit new public school teachers from among recent graduates of the nation’s most prestigious and selective colleges and universities. The effort has been made possible by the state’s new “alternate route” certification procedure that allows school districts to hire graduates of traditional liberal arts programs as provisional teachers. The new teachers do not need to pursue conventional, college-based teacher training. Leo Klagholz, teacher certification director for the state education department, said the liberalized licensing approach makes New Jersey unique in the nation in its ability to compete with private preparatory schools in recruiting graduates from Ivy League and other highly selective schools. (Braun 1985c, 1 and 27)

As can be seen, the above coverage seems to follow mostly thematic patterns. The title is thematic, referring to the state as an active player seeking to implement a noble cause. The story provides general details concerning the policy, the arguments supporting it, and potential implications. It relies only on state sources. The policy is communicated in a nonconflictual fashion, and the author adopts the state’s point of view, offering its arguments in support of the policy as though these were politically neutral, representing an authentic public desire for improvement in public education. Indeed, while the item includes 22 paragraphs, only three short paragraphs toward the end mention the fact that colleges of education criticize this policy, but none of their representatives are given the opportunity to respond and lay out their counter-arguments.

In the second case of the minimum salary policy, the findings suggest that the media overinflated the interests of economic elites¹⁸ while downplaying the wide, almost unprecedented consensus that existed between a Republican governor, a Democratic house majority, and the teacher unions in support of an increase in salary for beginning teachers. As can be seen in table 2, a subanalysis of the minimum salary policy reveals a conflict-oriented coverage in stories focusing on this issue ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 5.79, p = .016$), despite the support given to it by all major social agents of the field. The only opponents for the new bill were the minority Republican representatives and local boards of education, which feared the salary increase for beginning teachers would drive up the cost of education and might affect the cost of other professionals too (something the conservative right and economic elites, who were represented particularly by house Republicans, have traditionally opposed).

This overemphasis on the opposition’s claims is illustrated in a series of articles covering the debate around this policy. For example, in one of these

stories the author describes the debate in the democratic controlled senate, which passed the policy bill with a 36–2 vote majority. One of only two who voted against the bill, Congressman Lee Laskin (R), was given in the item disproportionate room to express his concerns:

Laskin pointed out that teachers in every town, “whether it’s Newark . . . Somerville, Trenton or Camden will make the same salary.” Laskin charged the legislation is counter to New Jersey’s labor laws which give employe[e]s the right to negotiate. “With the bill, you are saying to forget that labor law.” While he agreed that teachers should be paid more money, he said claims that the state would be able to attract better teachers through the mandated salary increase were “a lot of baloney.” . . . Laskin also lashed out at “the dopes in this room” who believe there will not be any ripple effect as the result of the legislation. (Lamendola 1985, 20)

The same item also included criticism voiced by the New Jersey School Boards Association: “The New Jersey School Boards Association expressed its concern over the potential ripple effect the minimum salary bill would have on veteran teachers who earn more than \$18,500. It has predicted strikes by the veterans who do not receive any increase under the bill and has said the potential cost of such actions would be a devastating burden on local taxpayers.” This very organization was described elsewhere by the educational editor of the *Star-Ledger* as an entity intended to “counterweight the growing power of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) . . . the school boards provide a vision of education that is something more expansive than more money and less work. . . . In the Legislature, the SBA has proven to be a formidable lobby, providing nervous legislatures with the spine needed to vote against the NJEA. The organization’s ability to block an ill-conceived expansion of public sector bargaining a year ago was only slightly less than a political miracle” (Braun 1985a). This conflictual coverage in the news created a misleading image of a struggle by devoting a disproportionately large space to players who were defeated by a large ad-hoc coalition consisting of the governor, the Democratic house, and teacher unions.

Last is the case of the “master teacher plan,” where the findings reaffirm the patterns found in the general analysis: a tendency to frame educational policy in episodic and conflictual terms. As can be seen in table 2, this policy was indeed far more likely to appear in episodic stories ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 19.79, p = .000$) tinted with conflict ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 8.36, p = .004$). We also found that the policy most associated with conflictual and episodic framing was also the policy most associated with teacher unions ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 19.22, p = .000$). The same was true, though to a far lesser extent, for the Department of Education ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 6.42, p = .011$). In contrast,

the governor appeared in these same stories at the same rate he did in the rest of the coverage, which positioned him above the policy conflict. Two examples illustrate these findings.

The first example brings a typical item that highlights episodic and conflictual framing of the debate between the teacher unions and the Department of Education over the master teacher plan. This item describes a hostile correspondence between the Newark school board (which was controlled by the city's teacher union) and the Department of Education concerning allegations of favoritism in selecting 200 master teachers for the \$5,000 merit bonuses.

State education commissioner Saul Cooperman rejecting a last minute appeal from the president of the Newark school board has said he will not permit state funding of the school system's "master teacher" program. The action came despite a late flurry of activity designed to save the \$1.2 million project. Including a formal request from the board president for another chance to "attempt to comply" with the program's requirements. "It's too late," Cooperman said after he received the letter from Charles A. Bell, the board president. . . . The Newark board had submitted the names of 200 teachers, the maximum allowable under the pilot program's guidelines. But Cooperman began an investigation after it was revealed that 20 of the awards were given to officials and building representatives of the Newark Teacher Union (NTU). . . . Newark response was a letter from Bell . . . denouncing the state analysis as "tomfoolery, if not trickery" (Braun 1985b, 1).

As can be seen, this example illustrates a classic episodic case that focuses and reduces the debate into a shallow and forceful exchange of messages between two prominent individuals while neglecting the larger context of the debate. In this case, as in many others, the commissioner and unions are engaged in a heated battle, leaving the governor untouched.

The second example illustrates the nonconflictual portrayal of the governor as someone who is running the show but is above the fray with respect to educational policy debate. The item reports on the governor's preorganized meeting with news reporters and editors. The governor used this opportunity to promote his vision, contending that "if you have the money, education is where you should spend it. . . . We are funding the schools. If money doesn't work, we will have to look elsewhere than money to find out what works. Most of the reforms proposed by the Kean administration deal with the quality of teacher education and with rewarding currently employed teachers. . . . The increases he has proposed during his administration have been the largest in the state's history" (Anonymous 1985). In this item the governor is using the media to promote particular policies and his overall education agenda to

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TABLE 3

Chi-Square Distribution of Frame and Sense of Conflict among Selected Policy Players (Comparisons Are Between the Player and All Other Players Combined)

Player	Frame	Conflict
Governor (present)	3.47 (E) (.063)	—
Governor (major)	—	10.31 (NC) (.001)
Department of Education (present)	3.01 (E) (.083)	2.9 (C) (.089)
Department of Education (major)	—	2.75 (C) (.097)
Teacher unions (present)	8.22 (E) (.004)	6.64 (C) (.01)
Teacher unions (major)	—	2.56 (C) (.11)
Teacher educators (present)	2.23 (T) (.135)	—
Teacher educators (major)	—	2.69 (C) (.1)
Legislature (place)	—	—
Legislature (major)	—	—

NOTE.—Findings with a .05 level of significance or below are bolded, but we also present findings with significance of .135 or lower to highlight possible trends in the data. Findings with higher levels of significance are omitted from the table. E = episodic; T = thematic; C = conflict; NC = not conflict.

the public. Such coverage positions the governor as a benevolent leader whose only interest is the welfare of his citizens.

Aggregate Framing and Conflict Analysis by Social Agents

Below we provide an aggregate summary of our findings regarding the framing of social agents in respect to the multiple educational policy debates they have participated in. Table 3 provides a summary of framing trends by two types of agents' appearance in the story (first, the agent portrayed as the major actor in the story; and second, the agent mentioned as a nonmajor actor in the story). Overall, the findings suggest a tendency among three policy agents—governor, Department of Education, and teacher unions—to be portrayed in more episodic terms than all other actors (see fig. 1 for a graphic presentation of the framing of key actors). Moving to an actor-by-actor analysis, we started by examining whether the framing of the governor was any different from the framing of other actors. Our findings suggest that stories featuring the governor were more episodic than stories from which he was absent, and this difference approached conventional levels of significance ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 3.47, p = .063$). When examining framing at the paragraph level, the difference was more striking. In stories where the governor appeared, on average, 57 percent of the paragraphs were episodic. In stories where he was absent, on average, 47 percent of the paragraphs were episodic $t(171) = 2.23, p = .03$ (two-tailed). Note that the differences were far smaller and not significant

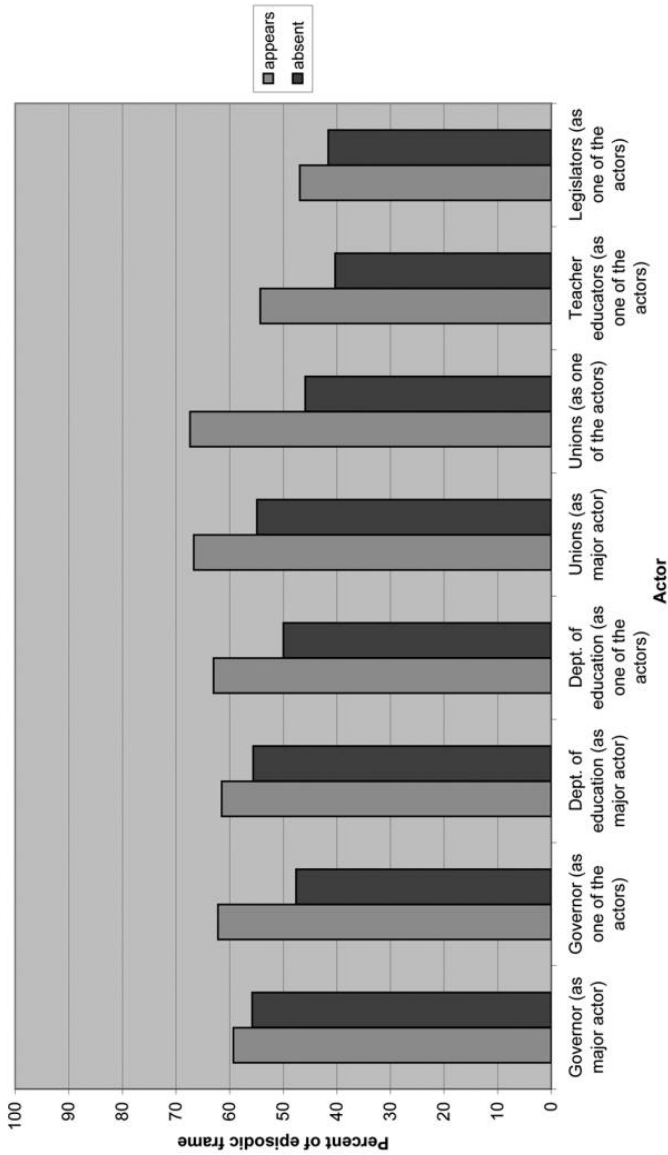


FIG. 1.—Relative frequency of episodic frame by actor in comparison to all other items in sample

when comparing the framing of stories where the governor was the major actor to all other stories (some of which included the governor as a secondary actor). A similar trend that approached, but did not meet, conventional levels of significance appeared in the portrayal of the Department of Education. Coverage that featured the department was more episodic than coverage from which it was absent ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 3.01, p = .083$). The differences in coverage were most pronounced in stories featuring the teacher unions. In 67.4 percent of these stories the coverage was episodic, as opposed to only 45.9 percent of the stories from which they were absent ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 8.22, p = .004$).

Finally, we examined the occurrence and nature of conflict in education policy coverage. As mentioned above, conflict was prevalent in the corpus, with more than 60 percent of the stories including conflictual elements. Our results suggest that the prevalence of conflict is tied to specific agents (see col. 3 of table 3). Figure 2 presents the relative frequency of conflict when an actor appears or is absent from coverage. For actors that were featured heavily as major characters in a story, we also show the relative frequency of conflict separately when they appear as major actors.

In stories where the governor was a major actor, conflict was much less prevalent than in stories where he did not figure so saliently ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 10.31, p = .001$). While conflict figured in close to 70 percent of stories where the governor was not a major figure, only slightly more than 40 percent of stories with the governor as the major actor had conflict as a defining characteristic. Interestingly, other state actors, particularly the Department of Education, did not demonstrate the same nonconflict patterns as the governor. Indeed, the findings suggest that conflict figured in 72 percent of the stories where the Department of Education was described as the major player (which is higher than the total average of 60 percent). Also, as expected, stories featuring the teacher unions were more heavily associated with conflict compared to stories not featuring the unions ($\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 6.61, p = .01$).

A direct comparison of these three agents—the governor, the Department of Education, and the union—also shows that they are implicated in conflict to different degrees when they feature as the major actor in a news story: 42.6 percent of the stories in which the governor was the major actor featured conflict, as opposed to 71.8 and 73.3 percent of the stories in which the Department of Education and the unions were the major actors, respectively. The differences between the portrayal of the governor and that of the Department of Education and the unions were significant ($p < .05$) given that the 95 percent confidence intervals for the frequency of conflict for the governor as the major actor compared to either the Department of Education or the unions did not overlap (governor: $.290 < CI [95 \text{ percent}] < .562$;

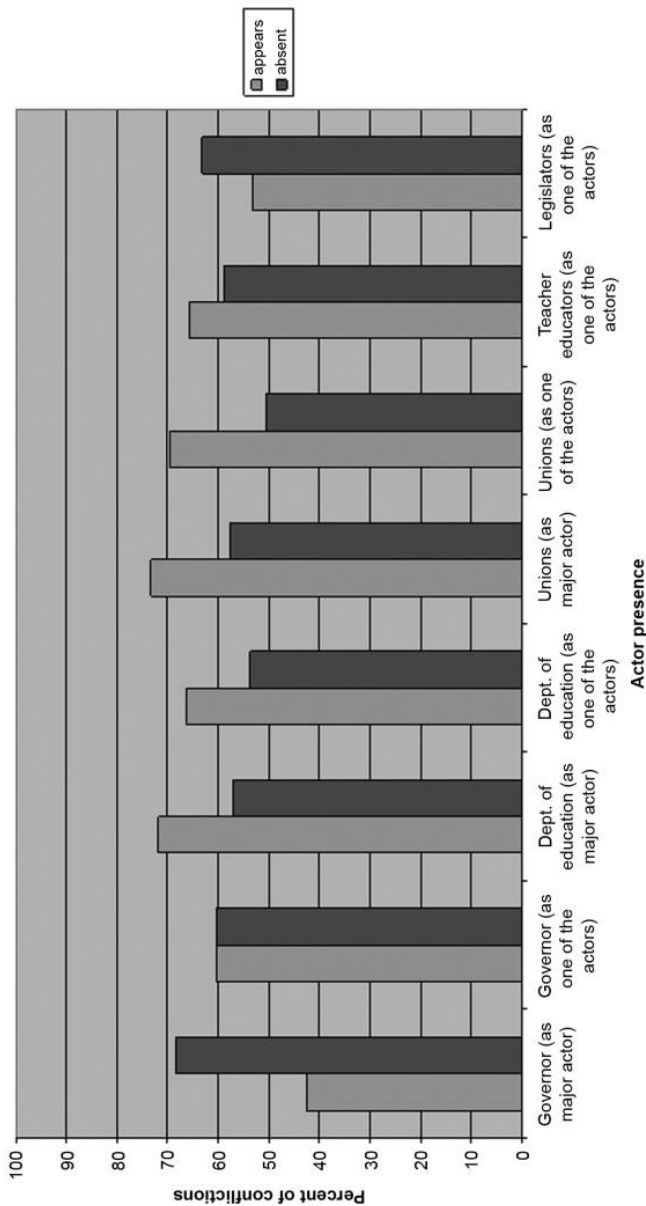


FIG. 2.—Relative frequency of conflict when actor appears in or is absent from newspaper coverage

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Department of Education: $.570 < CI [95 \text{ percent}] < .866$; unions: $.565 < CI [95 \text{ percent}] < .901$).

Discussion

The mass media has a distinct logic of practice that shapes how it represents and affects the public dialogue about education policy debates. Overall, the news coverage of the New Jersey policy debates was more episodic than thematic, potentially insulating powerful actors and proposed policies from public scrutiny. Although we do not have 1985 data regarding the impact of education coverage on the public at that time, there is evidence that dominant episodic framing leads the public by and large to blame individuals (or single out particular groups) for their predicaments, while shying away from holding government responsible for social problems (Iyengar 1991). Beyond the grossly unequal amount of coverage given to institutionalized actors such as the governor and the Department of Education, the media did not consistently supply the public with a coherent framework with which to analyze the actual role these towering figures play—a framework best delivered by thematic reporting.

The picture is even clearer when it comes to conflict. We found the coverage to have a dominant conflictual tone. Conflict-ridden coverage of other policy issues (e.g., health care) has been shown to activate cynical reactions among American voters (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Exposure to strategy and conflict has been linked among less educated Americans with a marked tendency to consider policy debates in less substantive terms, with a weaker intention to vote, and with reduced trust in government (Valentino et al. 2001). If these findings hold for our case study, then the coverage patterns we find should have limited the extent to which the broader public would have felt inclined to participate in the education policy debate, further magnifying the power of entrenched actors within the field.

Moreover, the one actor partially exempt from conflictual coverage was the New Jersey governor, who remained in mediated representations above the political fray as if serving only the public interest, while other actors were presented as involved in constant political bickering. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) have linked exposure to a strategy frame (in which conflict is a prominent element) to cynicism toward the specific actors portrayed in the coverage. This suggests that while most of the actors—Department of Education officials, teacher educators, teacher unions, and others—were subject to conflictual coverage and thus portrayed as self-interested actors (e.g., teacher unions were fighting only for their own narrow material goals rather than for better education for the children of New Jersey), the governor was mostly presented in nonconflictual terms, which helped fortify his political status as acting for

the common good of the state and its populace. This relative lack of conflict enjoyed by the governor is also consistent with instances in which U.S. presidents decide to “go public” and appeal directly to the electorate (Kernell 1997) so that they can effectively influence legislators to support presidential legislative efforts (Barrett 2004).

The selective conflict practices that were evident in the media coverage during 1985 had the potential of lifting the political stature of the governor and further cementing the legitimacy of his education policy agenda, while calling into question the right of others to oppose it. This is a key conclusion highlighting the power of the media to shape public discourse about educational policy that might go well beyond the specific case study of New Jersey during 1985, as presented in this article.

Both the framing and conflict patterns that we found and discussed above are consistent with Bourdieu’s notion of social field, suggesting that the media probably helped magnify the already significant advantage in political power that the governor enjoys in being associated with and having access to the multiple sources of the state’s power (termed by Bourdieu as “statist capital”). Insulating the governor from mediated conflict and submerging political minions and subaltern social groups in it further magnify the political capital of the governor. This is particularly evident in the weight given to state sources and responses when crafting a news item about a specific educational policy compared with the weight given to teacher educators’ responses. In those cases, real world conflict, struggle of interests, and ideological differences were partially muffled, giving state-sponsored policies a sheen of inevitability.

The apolitical presentation of the governor in the media had one exception. When the governor, together with a broad coalition of other actors, pushed for an increase in the minimum wage of teachers—a policy perceived as threatening to the interests of the business community—the media exaggerated the conflict and communicated a sense of crisis where little seems to have existed. Economic elites, which rarely figured directly in education policy debates (during that period), could count on the media to serve as a proxy and help blunt the pro-labor initiative. This is consistent with Bourdieu’s (2005a) argument about the media’s tendency to serve capital interests and with Swartz’s (1997) observation that economic capital is the most effective and versatile type of capital that exceeds even the political and symbolic capitals held by the political elite. More specifically, it links to research showing that the media only rarely supports labor positions (Kumar 2001).

Thus, there is little to support the pluralist conception of the media as an honest broker in policy debates. Overall, the interaction between the field of educational policy and the mass media corroborates the Bourdieuan scenario, as laid out in table 1—that is, of a field of educational policy that is largely, but not entirely, taken over by political and economic elites who are aware

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of the potential power held by the mass media and try to manipulate it to achieve maximum impact. The mass media responded to these pressures in part, but also adopted voluntarily some of the worldviews and policies associated with those held by political and economic elites. Work on the relationship between the media and political institutions in times of war (Hallin 1986) suggests that the media exercises autonomy (of a limited form), mostly when elites are in disagreement. The case before us, where the various influential education elites in New Jersey were seldom in accord, is such a case where the media had some scope for exercising autonomy but ended up adopting a tone of coverage that by and large supported the governor's efforts.

To conclude, our findings about the politics of education policy shed light on the important role that news media play in framing these debates, which is often ignored in the education policy literature. While this article suggests that news media are shaped in interaction with players in the field of education, we note that economic and political elites tend to benefit the most from the news coverage. This reality is not a product of a deterministic process, but rather the outcome of a fierce power struggle in which players bring to bear their capital to shape coverage that would further strengthen their position to pass specific policy initiatives and to round up the necessary support for implementing them. For education researchers and critical policy analysts, the lesson is that any careful analysis of a policy debate should not ignore the important role that traditional and/or new media sources play in framing and influencing the ways in which certain policy proposals are understood both by the larger public and by the policy elites themselves. Making this framing process more transparent to stakeholders and the public might motivate them to consider more carefully how they communicate their messages to the media and apply more pressure when they feel they are unfairly represented. In this regard, the decentralized new media venues on the internet could offer a potent alternative for groups and individuals who feel excluded or misrepresented by the traditional centralized news media (Benkler 2006; but see Hindman 2009 on the concentrated nature of online political discourse).

Further Avenues for Research

In the future, the conceptual tools developed in this work could be applied to a larger sample of news items in order to highlight the role of the media in shaping educational policy across the history of New Jersey. Such a study would help illuminate whether the role of the media remained constant or changed in response to different political and economical climates, particularly in response to a different education policy agenda that is dissimilar to the one considered in 1985.

Other future studies should aim to investigate news content (as was done here) while also employing indicators of the actual media strategies employed by the various actors and the extent of policy success the various actors enjoyed. This would allow us to develop a better understanding of the causal relationship between mediated representations and institutional strategies in the particular area of educational policy.

Finally, an important avenue is the study of the influence of new media forms on the education policy-making process. The rise of a 24-hour news cycle and the development of new internet-dependent political communication tools may allow actors to bypass traditional news organizations and appeal directly to a broader public while simultaneously trivializing the coverage of policy making by blurring the line between policy coverage and entertainment (Williams and Delli Carpini 2004). Celebrities can use new media arenas to partially bypass traditional media organizations (Poor 2006), and bloggers connected to political elites can challenge traditional media reporting (Maratea 2008), but it remains to be seen whether actors with less symbolic capital, like teacher educators, can reshape educational policy by using new media tools to change framing and conflict patterns in their favor.

TABLE A1

Status Summary of Educational Policy in New Jersey, 1985

Educational Policies under Discussion	Implemented	Agents in Support	Fail to Implement	Agents in Opposition
Alternative route to teacher certification	+	Governor, Dept. of Higher Education, State Board of Education, NJEA		NJFT, some members of the house Democratic majority, AACTE, teacher educators
Teacher preparation in colleges	+	Governor, Dept. of Education, Dept. of Higher Education		NJFT, some members of the house Democratic majority, AACTE, teacher educators in New Jersey
Minimum salary	+	Governor, Dept. of Education, Dept. of Higher Education, NJEA, NJFT, house Democratic majority		House Republican minority, New Jersey School Board Association
Master teacher plan	+	Governor, Dept. of Education, Dept. of Higher Education, NJFT	+	NJEA
Licensing exam for new teachers	+	Governor, Dept. of Education		Teacher educators
Academy for the Advancement of Teaching and Management	+	Governor, Dept. of Education		Teacher educators
Career ladder		Governor, Dept. of Education	+	NJEA, NJFT
Union contracts	+	NJEA, NJFT		
Standards tests/High School Proficiency Test	+	Governor, Dept. of Education		NJEA, NJFT, teacher educators
Outstanding teachers/recruitment grants/Dodge Fellowships for promising graduates/teacher recognition	+	Governor, Dept. of Education		NJEA

SOURCE.—Tamin, 2006.

Appendix B

Coding Definitions for Thematic and Episodic Frames

Thematic frame—places public issues in a general or abstract context. Characterized by:

1. a broad or nonspecific time frame
2. multiple and/or stunted storylines
3. large number of often abstract characters (e.g., “the public,” “teachers,” “parents”)
4. a mention of conflict tied to abstract actors (e.g., teachers, politicians, legislators, academia, *not unions*)

Episodic frame—takes the form of a case study or event-oriented report and depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances. Characterized by:

1. a limited time frame
2. limited number of well-developed story lines (often only one)
3. emotive or graphic language
4. small cast of often concrete characters (e.g., trade union leader X; headmaster Y)
5. a mention of conflict tied to a specific actor (individual or organization)
6. a focus on interpersonal tactics and strategies

Only some of the characteristics noted above had to be present for the headline/paragraph/item to be coded as thematic or episodic.

The characteristics were elaborated in Davidson (2007) based on Iyengar’s (1991) conceptualization of thematic and episodic frames and Pan and Kosicki’s (1993) framing analysis framework.

Notes

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1. We use the term “state” throughout this article to denote the executive branch within the state apparatus, that is, the governor and Department of Education. Unlike some states, where the commissioner of education is elected, and thus relatively au-

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tonomous, in New Jersey the commissioner of education is hired by the governor to carry out the governor's education agenda. Nevertheless, we are well aware of the fact that even within this particular context, the state is not a unitary entity. Indeed, as we point out in our findings, there is a clear difference in the way the media portrays the governor versus his education commissioner.

2. For instance, the state of New York provides an opposite example, where the governor's power in regard to education is relatively constrained by the regulatory power of the Board of Regents and legislators.

3. When asked, "Which, if any, of these institutions would you say has the highest standards of fairness and impartiality: business, or the news media, or organized labor, or the government?" the public felt by far most confident with the news media (44 percent). Government received 17 percent, business 13 percent, and organized labor only 11 percent. See Los Angeles Times Survey (1985).

4. It is important to note that historically, up until the 1980s, the political elite at the state level across the United States was often fairly remote from and disinterested in the nuts and bolts of education and educational policy, which were left to local district government, schools, and teacher unions.

5. The one application we found of framing theory to education policy debates examined coverage of *Brown v. Board of Education*. It seems to confirm that frames reflect power differentials and can be used to legitimate the existing (white) social order (Fleming-Rife and Proffitt 2004).

6. Kernell (1997) argues that the increasing prevalence of going public is an indicator of the shift from "institutionalized" to "individualized pluralism." However, the language he uses suggests that individualized pluralism describes a reality much closer to Bourdieu's unbalanced social field, where political and economic actors are increasingly powerful, than to a classic pluralist arena: "With proto-coalitions in disarray and members [of the American Congress] more sensitive to influences from beyond Washington, the president's hand in mobilizing public opinion has been strengthened" (34).

7. Appendix table A1 summarizes the educational policies that were under discussion during the first term of Kean in office. The table shows which players initiated, supported, or opposed the policies, and whether these policies were implemented or blocked.

8. The three policies include the minimum salary policy, which appeared in 61 news items (35 percent); the alternative route program to teacher certification, which appeared in 50 news items (29 percent); and the master teacher plan, which appeared in 43 news items (25 percent).

9. Before the alternate route program was established, individuals (with a BA degree) who wanted to become certified teachers needed to reenroll in college and spend at least one full year in a teacher education program.

10. "\$18,500.00 in 1985 had about the same buying power as \$37,939.76 in 2010. Average inflation rate during this period was about 2.91%" (cited in <http://www.dollartimes.com/calculators/inflation.htm#>). Average beginning teachers' salary in New Jersey today is \$37,061 (cited in <http://www.teachersalaryinfo.com/average-teacher-salary-new-jersey.html>). This suggests that since Kean's reform of 1985, novice teachers' salaries in New Jersey stagnated.

11. For example, in 2008, Michelle Rhee, chancellor of the District of Columbia's public schools, proposed a contentious merit pay program that offered up to \$135,000 in salary and bonuses to "effective teachers" who would be willing to let go of their tenure. Other recent cases include Superintendent Michael Bennet, who successfully expanded a performance pay plan for teachers in Denver; New York City's Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, who passed a performance-

pay plan for teachers; and the Florida house and senate, which passed a teacher merit pay bill.

12. Despite the exhaustive nature of the sample, we decided to use parametric statistical tests when analyzing it. Therefore, although the sample is not necessarily representative of other years and education policy debates, a parametric test can be informative about how striking the differences we uncover are in the sample and hint at the possibility that similar patterns might be encountered in the case of other education policy debates.

13. Generic frames “can be found in relation to different topics . . . and potentially in different political and cultural contexts” (De Vreese, 2001). Their applicability is therefore more general than that of subject-specific frames.

14. Given the importance of the *Abbott v. Burke* case for school funding and education equity in New Jersey, some readers might be surprised to learn that we did not find items covering this issue in the Newark *Star-Ledger* during 1985. Just as a precautionary measure, we conducted a specific search for coverage on the *Abbott v. Burke* ruling of 1985 in the *New York Times*. This search yielded only one relevant item (the search terms were “Abbott v. Burke” + “New Jersey”). There are several possible explanations for this lack of coverage by the media. In 1985, when New Jersey’s economy was strong, the governor allocated record amounts to education. In what might have been the result of that economic climate, the 1985 Supreme Court ruling on *Abbott v. Burke* turned out to be relatively subtle. The court decided that final ruling on the case is premature and instead returned the case to New Jersey’s commissioner of education for a detailed administrative review.

15. The analysis of this genre suffered from lower reliability due to the idiosyncratic nature of many of these contributions, given that they are not written by professional journalists working according to standard conventions. However, the small number (9 percent) and the low-key placement in the newspaper make their potential influence very limited. Thus, excluding them does not damage significantly the substantive representativeness of our sample.

16. In order to determine this procedure, we checked a small sample and compared for patterns of conflict in the news by using two different techniques: (1) searching for conflict in the entire news item, and (2) searching for conflict in the headline, sub-heading, and first three paragraphs of an item. Since the two methods yielded almost identical results, we decided to use the second method.

17. See Tamir (2010) for a detailed analysis of the types and volumes of capitals held by different social agents in the field of educational policy in New Jersey.

18. These findings about the impact of the business community on educational policy in New Jersey are consistent with those reported by Dennis Carlson (1992) in his book *Teachers and Crisis*.

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