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# The elite American press coverage of the 2009-2010 health care reform debate

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**The elite American press coverage of the 2009-2010 health care reform debate**

by

**Steven James Adams**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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Ames, Iowa

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## Abstract

Communication researchers largely condemned news coverage of the 1993-1996 health care reform debate, producing empirical proof that the American media offered citizens little useful information about the issues involved, the substance of proposed legislation, or the potential consequences of passing or not passing legislation. This study seeks to determine whether the “elite press” followed suit in its coverage of the 2009-2010 health care reform debate, or if it fared better. It applies paragraph-by-paragraph content analysis to investigate the framing and sourcing of fourteen months’ worth of articles in *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. Results show that the game frame was dominant, yet was not significantly more prominent than the issue/economic consequences frame, and the conflict frame was rare; both framing and sourcing change significantly over the course of the debate; and many significant relationships exist between specific sources and frames.

## Introduction

### A Hard Road for Health Care

Though rising and falling in its importance to the media, politicians, and the American people from decade to decade and president to president, health care reform has been a prominent issue in American politics for the last century, discussed and debated in a number of diverse contexts (Chard, 2004). The Medicare and Medicaid legislation of 1965, however, represent the only major policy changes in the U.S. health care system, as Congress after Congress has lacked the public support to pass legislation that would more significantly affect the status quo.

Of the many attempts to address health care, the case of former President Bill Clinton's National Health Security Act (HSA) stands out. Such is the case not only because the HSA presented Americans with "one of the most comprehensive domestic policy proposals made by an American president in this (20th) century" (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 58) and one of its longest-lasting and most intense policy debates, but also because it led a wealth of scholars to the common conclusion that the media played an integral role in its eventual failure (Brodie, 1996; Chard, 2004; Corrigan, 2000; Hacker, 1997; Jamieson & Cappella, 1998; Koch, 1998; Kohut, Brady, & James, 1995; Pan & Kosicki, 2001; Skocpol, 1995, 1996; Walsh-Childers, Chance, & Swain, 1999; West, Heith, & Goodwin, 1996).

Studied in various contexts and through various methodologies, researchers generally confirmed the public's perception that, with only 44% of Americans saying that the media was doing a "good job" of covering the issue in September 1993 and only 32% did so in August 1994, "the media flunked the job" (Kohut et al., 1995, p. 2). The



overarching observation was that the media made their impact not only by quite innocently reporting the words and frames of anti-reform politicians and interest groups, but also, through more conscientious choices, by failing to provide the public with the quantity and quality of information that, as Gans (1979) puts it, is “inherently necessary for the proper functioning of society” (p. 327).

This may have been the case because the media were found to treat the debate largely as they tend to treat elections, focusing on “tactics over issues, attack over advocacy, and scandal over substance” (Jamieson & Cappella, 1998, p. 110). “Market-driven journalism” prevailed, and the media produced news as a dramatic “product more designed to sell than inform” (Bagdikian, 1990; McManus, 1997, p. 83).

### **Another Chance?**

Yet the media were given another chance. With health care expenditures rising from \$714 billion in 1990 to over \$2.2 trillion in 2007 (Kaiseredu.org, 2009), health care was a central election issue in 2008 and a key priority for President Obama once he entered the White House. And while the issue got off to a slow start – Pew reported that only 7% of news coverage was devoted to it in mid-June (Pew, 6/17/2009) – health care accounted for a third of all news coverage in August (Jurkowitz, 2009) and was one of Americans’ most closely followed issues throughout the fall (Pew, 11/19/2009).

This was true regardless of the public perception of low-quality coverage by the media. For, just as was the case in 1994 (Kohut et al., 1995), public comprehension fell as coverage rose: 63% of Americans said the issue was hard to understand in July 2009, while 67% said so in September (Pew 9/8/2009). What’s more, Americans regarded coverage to be not only low in information, but defined by conflict (Pew, 9/16/2009).

While such allegations would be concerning regarding any news coverage, they would be especially disheartening if true with regard to the coverage of health care reform. Such a contention is based on the presumption that because reform could affect Americans of every age, state, and tax bracket, many citizens, who tend to “become intensely emotionally energized when they perceive that policy initiatives threaten to change their personal health system” (Conrad & McIntush, 2003, p. 421), would likely feel that they have a personal stake in the legislation. As a result, one can also presume that many citizens would attempt to inform themselves of the issues, form an opinion regarding the legitimacy of the need for legislation and the proposed legislation itself, and finally voice their opinion in a process that leads to the ideal of participatory government – that is, government action driven by citizens’ wants (Dewey, 1958; Sartori, 1987).

For while often regarded as impossible, such direct democracy can occur. Because representatives get their voting cues from their constituents, who will vote for or against those who decide legislative outcomes, and are especially responsive to their opinions when confronted with proposals that would greatly alter the status quo (Kingdon, 1989, 1995), public opinion can significantly affect policy outcomes (Arnold, 1990; Burstein, 2003; Gonzenbach, 1996; Kingdon, 1994, 1995; Page & Shapiro, 1983; Strouse, 1975) and has been found to do so regarding health policy (Chard, 2004; Jacobs, 1992, 1993; Koch, 1998; Pan & Kosicki, 2001). As Chard (2004) bluntly concluded, public opinion can in fact “make or break American public policy proposals” (p. 76).

Yet none of this informed, deliberative democracy can occur if citizens are not offered the quantity and quality of information on which their beliefs and evaluations of policy proposals depend. As Tuchman (1978) put it, “The news media set the frame in

which citizens discuss public events and... the debate necessarily depends on the information available” (p. 183). The question, then, is if the media in 2009 provided citizens – citizens who, one recalls, are dependent on the media for information about all that is outside their direct experience, including policy news (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987) – with the type of news that Jamieson and Cappella (1998) and so many others found in the past and citizens alleged in the present, or if they offered better. This study aimed to answer this question, inspired by the belief that a good democracy – one in which policy is created to reflect the wants of a well-informed majority – requires a citizenry exposed to a large quantity of high-quality information. To do so, it applied framing theory to produce an empirical analysis of how three elite American newspapers covered the 14-month health care debate, and sought to further framing and policy research by also investigating the use of sources, the change in frames and sources over time, and the source-frame relationship.

## Literature Review

Although it's true that "the wealth of political information of potential concern to the public that surfaces every day exceeds the capacity to publicize it, and selections must be made" (Graber, McQuail, & Norris, 1998, p. 2), some issues inevitably come to dominate the news media's agenda. Health care was clearly one such issue in the latter half of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010, and was also considered an important issue by Americans. What's unclear is exactly how the media covered this issue over time, and framing theory provides the guidelines on how to answer this uncertainty.

### Framing Theory

News, as Schramm (1949) defined it, is "an attempt to reconstruct the essential framework" of an event or issue (p. 288). Therefore, although journalists often claim that news is a 'mirror' held up to society, "it is actually a highly selective account of events... news is a construct: it is a version of reality [that is] shaped" (Patterson, 1998, p. 17). For a journalist, then, "Making news is the act of constructing reality itself rather than a picture of reality" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 12).

Framing is essentially the communication of this construction, and stems from the fact that all news content reflects many selective and subjective choices that have been made by the media. As Entman (1993) defined it, framing "involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text" (p. 52). Framing deals not with salience but with perceptions (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005); not with *what* the media cover and how much they coverage they afford it, but rather *how* the media cover it and suggest *how to think* about it (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001, p. 69).

Thus, whether due to professional routines, social and economic responsibilities, or less discernible factors (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), the media frame events, actors, and issues “through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991, p. 3). News frames, as the outcomes of the framing process, “constitute an exercise (intentional or, quite often, unintentional) of journalistic power; frames can draw attention toward and confer legitimacy upon particular aspects of reality while marginalizing other aspects” (Lawrence, 2000, p. 93). At a minimum, they define what is relevant about an issue and structure the conversation surrounding it (Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Iyengar, 1991; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Reese, 2001; Tuchman, 1978). With greater implications, they can “promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Entman, 2004, p. 5), and hence have powerful audience effects.

As Iyengar and Kinder (1987) explain, since much of the public’s knowledge and information about public affairs is mediated, its opinions may be substantially shaped by the presentation of information. Frames can “encourage particular ‘trains of thought’ which citizens make use of in judgments” (De Vreese, 2004, p. 36), and scholars have demonstrated that frames can shape citizens’ support of various policies (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001; Iyengar, 1991; Khaneman & Tversky, 1984; Kinder & Nelson, 1990; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Zaller, 1990).

As Entman (1993) noted, such effects are most likely when frames are repetitive and consistent, and many scholars view these characteristics as central to a frame’s existence. Gitlin (1980), for example, defined news frames as “*persistent* patterns... by which symbol-handlers *routinely* organize discourse” (p. 7), while Entman (2004) said

that they can be conceptualized as “scripts” which represent “*standardized* information processing rules that journalists” regularly utilize in their reporting (p. 26). Along the same lines, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argue that for frames to exist – and therefore to be studied – they in fact must consist of “characteristics commonly observed in journalistic practice” (p. 49). Made manifest in what Gamson and Modigliani (1989) call “framing devices” (p. 3), which carry or transmit a dominant frame, frames must be detected apart from core news facts.

Yet many framing devices, all of which most fundamentally rely on specific vocabularies (Miller, 1997; Miller & Riechart, 2001), hold the potential to resonate with and influence the audience. Perhaps the most commonsensical device that signifies a dominant frame is the headline, which, according to Andrew (2007), serves to “introduce, advertise, and communicate the importance of a story... to provide a summary or a shortcut to what comes next” (p. 28). By “playing up” a slice of what follows, a headline can perform the main framing function for the audience even if it sees nothing else (Tannenbaum, 1953).

However, for those who do expose themselves, many aspects of news content can serve as framing devices. Entman (1993) suggested that news frames can be examined and identified by “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) similarly name metaphors, exemplars, catch-phrases, depictions, and visual images as framing devices. In a lengthy list, Tankard et al. (1991) suggests eleven framing devices, or “focal points,” that can direct readers’ attention: headlines, subheads, photos, photo

captions, leads, source selection, quotes selection, pull quotes, logos, statistics and charts, and concluding statements and paragraphs.

Given all of this, it's clear that a plethora of framing devices may resonate with and influence the audience, and subsequently that media scholars have many choices when attempting to identify the prevalent frames of general of subject-specific news coverage. As such, it is highly valuable to discuss what frames have been most often observed in the media's coverage of political, public policy, and health care news – and therefore might have been applied during the 2009-2010 health care reform debate.

### **Framing Politics**

While the media can offer diverse issue-specific frames – that is, frames that pertain to specific topics or news events – when covering diverse political issues, communication scholars have recognized and defined certain generic frames –frames that are broadly applicable to a range of different news topics over time – in the news media's political coverage (De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

Perhaps the best-regarded is the issue frame, which conveys much substantive information. In elections, for example, it stresses candidates' qualifications and policy positions (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), yet has been found lacking in the face of a focus on candidates' images (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, & McCombs, 1998; Druckman, 2005). Along with images, the game, strategy, or “horserace” frame has been found to dominate both print and television (Paletz & Entman, 1981; Jamieson, 1992; Patterson, 1993; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Fox et al., 2005). While far from rare in many European countries, for example Sweden, the issue frame is not prevalent in American media's coverage of U.S. elections (Stromback & Dimitrova, 2006).

Yet more general news seems to lend itself to a wider array of media frames. In a recent meta-analysis of 131 framing studies published in fifteen leading American and foreign communication journals from 1990 to 2005, Matthes (2009) found the most commonly-cited generic frames (reported in only 22% of studies) to include the conflict frame (12 studies), the issue frame (9), the thematic frame (9), the attribution of responsibility frame, the economic consequences frame, the episodic frame, and the human interest frame (8 studies each). Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) identified five distinct generic frames most commonly used by both media and audience: human impact, powerlessness, economic, moral value, and conflict (pp. 74-75).

Considering predominant media frames in international news, Valkenburg, Semetko, and De Vreese (1999) similarly identified the conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, and economic consequences frames as most common (p. 551), and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) found attribution of responsibility, conflict, and economic consequences frames to dominate in Dutch media's coverage of news related to the European Union. Research on political news and newsworthiness suggests that political news in the U.S. is often framed in terms of conflict and economic consequences as well (Bennett, 2009; Gamson, 1992; Graber, 1988; McManus, 1994; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

From this brief review, it seems that journalists could apply – and as will be discussed later, sources could offer – numerous frames to policy-related news content. As Koch (1998) noted, policy issues and policymaking are indeed “multidimensional in their attributes” (p. 212). Thus health care reform – an issue involving such elements as



thousand-page legislation, billions of dollars, political process, and partisan debate – seems most likely to be discussed using the following four policy-related frames.

**Issue frame.**

The issue frame is perhaps the most obvious frame for the news, and is founded on the media’s provision of substantive information. It is based on “hard news,” defined as that information which “is presumably important to citizens’ ability to understand and respond to the world of public affairs” (Patterson, 2000, p. 3). Thus if a story is to be issue-framed, it must include the “core” news facts of who’s involved, what’s involved, and what’s at stake. According to Baker (1998), the frame can also “reduce the information costs of the attentive public” by putting information in context and periodically explaining its history or implications (pp. 12-13).

Yet while arguably allowing the media to fulfill their social responsibility best, the issue frame may not be a popular choice of journalists because it’s widely viewed as a poor way to attract and retain readers who seek short, engaging, and easily-digestible news (McManus, 1994). As Gans (1979) said, “an aspect of the journalist’s bargain with the audience is to not burden it excessively with complicated stories and excessive detail” (p. 242) – clearly something that could result from issue-framing. In sum, the issue frame requires much of both journalists and the audience, suggesting why it has been found lacking in coverage of policy in general and health care specifically.

***Issue frames in public policy coverage.***

Given that it can “inform and mobilize public opinion” (Cook, 1989, p. 171), the issue frame is clearly relevant to public policy coverage; however it is not prevalent. Gans (1979), for example, found issue-framed news about policy and legislation to

quickly give way to conflict-framing, while Lawrence (2000) found national newspapers to offer “information of use to the public” only after legislation’s passage, when it was “too late to help the public participate meaningfully in the debate” (p. 109).

Yet the potential for issue-framing of health care policy is great. Given what’s involved in the issue, the media could provide citizens with substantive information regarding both current and proposed health care policy’s level of access, quality, and cost (Conrad & Millay, 2001, p. 53). As Fallows (1996) remarked, “There were many significant aspects to the [HSA], any of which the press might have emphasized in helping the public decide whether it wanted to take this step” (p. 205). Walsh-Childers et al. (1999) noted the importance of such information:

As policy changes and develops, it will be important for the American public to have access to information about the organization, delivery and financing of health care. Policy concerns will increase the need for the news media to provide accurate and understandable information that can help [citizens] to understand how potential changes would affect their access to care, the quality of care they receive and the costs they will pay (p. 1).

Employing the issue frame, however, would require journalists to wade through a complex and convoluted “mosaic” of policies and systems that constitute American health care (Aaron, 1996; Kleinke, 1998; Leyerle, 1994), and this is perhaps why Walsh-Childers et al. (1999) found that “stories related to health care reform were practically devoid of information that would help consumers, health professionals or business owners understand how proposed changes would affect them” (p. 10).

Indeed, Kohut et al. (1995) found that the media offered little coverage exploring how the HSA and other proposals would be paid for and would affect quality, delivery, and cost, while journalists Hamburger, Marmor, and Meachem (1994) condemned the failure to compare proposals to foreign health care systems (p. 37). Jamieson and

Cappella (1998) came to the same conclusions, finding that 110 different titles were given to just 27 House and Senate proposals; terms such as “universal access,” which refers to affordability, and “universal choice,” which refers to employer-provided coverage, were left undefined and undifferentiated; and, by the numbers, just 26% of print stories and 16.5% of broadcast stories focused on the issues of health care. As they remarked, “those in-the-know – reporters, politicians, and pundits alike – stopped elaborating and started eliding [as the debate progressed]... the result was telegraphy without a codebook” (p. 112).

By and large, Hacker (1997) concluded, “The news media did not reveal themselves to be capable of thoughtfully analyzing the problems in American medical care or explaining the merits and demerits of competing reform approaches” (p. 141). However research shows that another informative frame may be more likely.

#### **Economic consequences frame.**

The economic consequences (ecocon) frame offers substantive information by focusing on the actual or potential economic impacts of any event, issue, or policy on individuals, societies, or nations, and is often manifest in reports of costs and savings (Neuman et al., 1992; Valkenburg, Semetko, & De Vreese, 1999; De Vreese, 2001). Journalists often choose the frame because virtually any news item can be tied to economics – and one can perceive why they might tend to do so.

For while economic information may be just as meaningful as the information provided by issue-framing, dollars and cents are easily-comprehensible and may attract an audience at an emotional level because they, as citizen-taxpayers, are paying for what the government does. Indeed, McManus (1994) suggested that the ecocon frame meets

the journalistic values of “proximity” and “consequence,” and many others have asserted that the media often focus on the economics of an issue in an attempt to make it relevant to the audience (Price, 1989; Graber, 1993; Neuman et al., 1992).

***Ecocon frames in public policy coverage.***

Given their potential to re-allocate resources and affect taxes, public policy issues lend themselves well to the ecocon frame. In her seminal work, Stone (1997) stresses economic considerations, specifically those of how costs are measured, who’s to pay, and who’s to benefit, as central to policy debates, and research has found news coverage to reflect this. News about oil drilling policy, for example, was found to focus on gas prices, unemployment, and U.S. dependency on oil imports (Zaller, 1992), while Nelson and Oxley (1999) observed the ecocon frame in coverage of a land development proposal.

U.S. health care policy, as a tax-funded social provision, is a clear recipient of the ecocon frame (Marmor & Christianson, 1982). Regarding the HSA, Walsh-Childers et al. (1999) found that the “few stories deemed informative were primarily framed in terms of [the] proposal’s economic consequences” (p. 12), for example discussing the cost to business owners of the employer-provided health insurance mandate or the decline in insurers’ reimbursement payments to health-insurance subscribers.

In addition, Pear (1993) and Koch (1998) both noted that much of the emphasis on economics came from the media’s sources, many of whom argued that reform would increase taxes and the cost of care. Indeed, anti-reform voices have been found to regularly mount an “ideological assault” by framing any and all potential health care reform as a socialized threat to free-market capitalism (Aune, 2000; Blank, 1988; Conrad & McIntush, 2003; Hamburger et al., 1994; Kronenfeld, 1997; Marmor, 2000), and the

media transmitted this perspective, voiced both by Republicans and interest groups, in coverage of the HSA (Patel & Rushefsky, 1998; Shelton, 2000; Skocpol, 1996).

Yet the ecocon frame is diverse; while Conrad and Millay (2001) found it to be supported by the media's inclusion of sources arguing that tort reform would make coverage unaffordable for employers and lead to other "inevitable and perverse economic consequences" (p. 161), coverage also included advocates arguing that tort reform would "enhance the corrective mechanisms of the free market" by holding HMOs economically-accountable (p. 160). Lepre et al. (2003) found supporters to have the advantage in ecocon-framed coverage as well thanks to the media's vilification of insurers as "wholly cost-centered" (p. 15).

In sum, the ecocon frame – whether in support of or against reform – seems an oft-utilized option when framing health care policy in informative terms.

### **Game frame.**

In stark contrast to the issue and ecocon frames, the game frame (encompassing the "strategy," "horserace," and "process" frames) "presents public life as a contest among scheming political leaders" (Fallows, 1996, p. 7). With a "politics-as-a-game" perspective, reporters game-frame by acting as "politics-wonks" rather than "policy-wonks," focusing on "inside baseball rather than more important questions of how government should run the country" (Schudson, 1995, p. 10). The game frame offers drama and little substantive information.

Often defined in terms of elections, Patterson (1993) defined game-framed news as that which emphasizes strategies and predictions of outcomes, while Jamieson (1992) more broadly viewed it as that which (1) focuses on winning and losing, (2) includes the

language of games and competition, (3) contains performers, critics, and audiences, (4) focuses on candidates' style and perceptions, and (5) gives weight to polls and candidate standings. Neuman et al. (1992), however, noted that the game frame is not exclusive to election coverage, but can be applied to any political news when journalists offer an “interpretation of the political world as an ongoing series of contests with a new set of winners and losers” (p. 64).

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) remarked that the game frame in fact dominates the American media's coverage of policy, and offered this all-encompassing definition of it:

Stories about politicians winning or losing elections, legislative debates, or politics in general; stories about politicians' (or others') strategies for winning (e.g., campaign tactics, legislative maneuvers); stories about the implications of elections or legislative debates for politicians and parties; stories focused narrowly on specific legislative or implementation developments (e.g., who did what yesterday on the welfare reform bill), on the 'tone' of legislative debates, or on the implications for the ultimate passage or implementation of legislation (33).

In addition, the frame can also encompass an emphasis on the “phase structure” of policymaking (Fishman, 1980), or the “process frame,” which allows journalists to impose a “master narrative” by focusing on the unfolding steps that lead to a legislative outcome. As Cook (1989) noted, “reporters accord a coherence to the legislative process by focusing on congressional actions and the way bills are passed” (p. 169), and Baker (1998), Paletz, Reichert, and McIntyre (1971), and Tidmarch and Pitney (1985) observed the same. Thus, whether through a focus on the game, strategic actions, or the policymaking process, it's clear that policy news could be easily game-framed.

Indeed, the use of this wide-ranging frame makes sense. At the most basic level, game-framing is not only easier for journalists than researching thousands-page long legislation (Fallows, 1996; Patterson, 1998), but is also a common choice because

Americans are attracted to competition, personalization, and the definition of “winners” and “losers” (Bennett, 2009; Gans, 1979; Paltez & Entman, 1981). In addition, reporting politicians’ strategic manipulations and offering a “master narrative” also likely draws readers (Fishman, 1980; Rothberg, 1998). Finally, the frame serves a practical purpose:

Treating politics like sports allows journalists to maintain an apparent stance of objectivity. By focusing on the ‘technical’ aspects of the political game – strategies, tactics, wins and losses [and process] – journalists can more easily avoid appearing to take sides politically (Hallin, 1994, p. 25).

As such, it’s no surprise that scholars have found the frame prevalent in policy coverage.

***Game frames in public policy coverage.***

The game frame, which may offer valuable information about the policymaking process and its participants, but little about policy itself, is prevalent in media coverage.

Elving (1998), for example, observed a heavy dose of the game frame in his analysis of media coverage of the Family and Medical Leave Act, and specifically noted reporters’ regular emphasis of the fact that the bill’s 237 House votes were not enough to override an expected veto. Callaghan and Schnell (2001) likewise found a decade’s worth of news about control policy to primarily focus on interest groups’ “game plans” and the political process’s “logjams,” and Lawrence (2000) found the frame applied to 41% of stories on welfare reform. Of note, she remarked that “The strategic angle was almost exclusively reserved for news emanating from inside the Beltway (p. 104), where reporters discussed policy in terms of the upcoming election, and also found the game frame most prevalent at the end of the debate. As she put it, “As the Washington policy-making process nears its ‘finish line,’ and when a ‘score’ is highly consequential for one or both ‘teams,’ news coverage not only increases in volume but shifts in frame to emphasize political process and strategy” (p. 109).

In coverage of Clinton's HSA, however, Jamieson and Cappella (1998) observed a rather constant stream of game-framed coverage from the media. They reported that 62% of print stories focused on "who is winning and losing and how the game is being played" (p. 118), supporting their earlier claim that "The frame is generalized by journalists from campaigns to policy issues" (1997, p. 33). As they concluded in no uncertain terms:

The press in 1993-1994 covered the health care reform debate in a fashion similar to that ordinarily applied to campaigns for public office. By imposing the norms of campaign coverage on a policy debate, the press minimized the public's ability to learn about the problem and the proposals to address it (1998, p. 110).

Many other scholars observed what Hacker (1997) called the media's "hyper-political style of coverage" as well (p. 141). Fallows (1996) found that during the presidential campaign most stories about potential health care reform described it in strategic terms, while the media continued to game-frame post-election by "instinctively cast[ing] the health reform fight as a test of the president's 'clout' and popularity" (p. 220). Kohut et al. (1995) reported that stories on winning and losing, strategy, the balance of power, and motives were the norm. Walsh-Childers et al. (1999) agreed, observing that "stories reflected a far greater interest in how passage or defeat would affect the politicians supporting or opposing it [rather than the public]" (p. 10).

An exceptional example of such framing was the "Kristol Memo," which suggested that if the HSA passed, Clinton would establish a "Democratic dynasty" built on the bill, just as Roosevelt had done through the Social Security Act and the New Deal (Chard, 2004, p. 110). However Kristol suggested that if Republicans adopted an "aggressive and uncompromising counterstrategy" (quoted in Skocpol, 1995, pp. 75-76) – namely framing the "national health care crisis" as fabricated by Democrats – and the



HSA failed, it would represent a significant defeat for all Democrats and “could ultimately mean that Republicans would regain control of the White House in 1996” (Chard, 2004, p. 110). By granting the memo and its contents heavy coverage, the media offered both the public and congressmen a view of the HSA as one big political game.

Like Jamieson and Cappella (1998), Fallows (1996) thus viewed the media as treating and personifying the HSA as “a candidate in an election... [competing for] the support of balkanized interest groups” (p. 224). Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) observed the media’s daily predictions for passage, and Kohut et al. (1995) reported that 62% of health care articles published between June and November 1994 did in fact offer odds on passage. Even journalists acknowledged the prevalence of the game frame, with Hamburger et al. (1994) castigating the fact that media coverage “resembled nothing so much as the hasty horserace stories of a political campaign” (p. 37).

In conclusion, the health care debate was framed as a “political rather than technical struggle” (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 53). As Jamieson and Cappella (1998) lamented, game-framing “diverted public attention from a topic it expressed interest in, displaced a focus on the arguments and evidence for and against policy options, activated public cynicism about health care proposals and their proponents, and depressed public learning (p. 118). Because the frame dominated, substantive information, which the last prominent frame also lacks, did not.

### **Conflict frame.**

Focusing little on policy outcomes but much on participants, the conflict frame refers to the media’s tendency to seek two sides in an attempt to provide balance but, more importantly, dramatic controversy (Reese, 2001; Underwood, 1998). Politics is a

clear target of this frame given that it “always entails struggle in democratic societies” (Graber et al., 1998, p. 1). Indeed, politics is about little else but “who gets what, when, and how” (Lasswell, 1936), and thus oozes with conflict. The frame thus seems an ever-present option to journalists, able to exist not only when two parties are in explicit disagreement, but just as easily when journalists consciously manufacture it.

Alluding to the former, Cupach and Canary (1997) and Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2001) regard conflict as an expressed struggle between interdependent parties who perceive goal incompatibility and interference from the other party in individual goal achievement. Such conflict is based on intrapersonal perceptions of conflicted parties’ incompatible definitions, interpretations, or “cognitive frames” of what’s at issue (Donohue & Kolt, 1992; Folger et al., 2001; Sillars, 1980; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001).

The media may stress numerous aspects of such incompatibility to support the conflict frame. According to Pinkley (1990), these include the relationship-task frame, which focuses on the degree to which one expresses concern about the relationship with the other; the emotional-intellectual frame, which focuses on the degree to which one describes the conflict with anger or frustration; and the compromise-win frame, which focuses on the extent to which one views the conflict as the other’s responsibility.

Clearly, objective points of disagreement and potential compromise are ignored.

Adding to this list, Rogan (2006) found six specific frames used to stress conflict: 1) the “instrumentality frame,” focusing on the objective facts that inform one side’s or another’s outcome orientation; 2) the “other assessment frame,” discussing parties’ perception of the other; 3) the “affective frame,” describing parties’ emotional intensity towards the other and the disagreement; 4) the “face frame,” focusing on the self-image

of conflicted parties’; 5) the “affiliation frame,” emphasizing parties’ shared responsibility and potential collaboration; 6) and finally the “distributiveness frame,” focusing on conflict resolution and winners’ benefits and losers’ disappointments.

Yet even if conflict is not conspicuous, the media can choose to utilize the frame even if conflict does not truly exist, and tend to regularly report the two most extreme positions on an issue in order to manufacture discord (Gans, 1979). And while evidence suggests that conflict-framing can make citizens more cynical about politics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), the media are drawn to two-sided issues because reporting conflict is easier than explaining issues and helps achieve objectivity (Cook, 1989; Price, 1989). Many scholars have also said that the media seek and create conflict because it attracts readers and subsequently profits (Chomsky & Hermann, 1988; Graber, 1993; McManus, 1992; Fallows, 1996; Staab, 1990).

As Manheim (1998) explained, “News organizations, like any other commercial enterprise, live in a risk-reward environment. Because news that features prominent personalities and simplified conflict builds audiences, it provides rewards” (p. 100). Indeed, use of the conflict frame in policy coverage seems likely. Fights about the legitimacy of ideas, the distribution of whatever is at issue, and how reforms will be paid for are the stuff of which policy debates are made (Stone, 1997), and the most divisive debates are the most newsworthy (Cook, 1989; Lawrence, 2000). Invariably, research on policy coverage supports these contentions.

***Conflict frames in public policy coverage.***

Given the partisan politicians and money involved, conflict-framing has been found to abound in media coverage of policymaking. Callaghan and Schnell (2001), for

example, found the media to often describe the debate over gun control policy as a “battle” or “war” between Democrats, Republicans, and interest groups, while Jaspersen, Shah, Watts, Faber, and Fan (1998) observed four predominant conflict frames in the media’s coverage of budget policy: “talk,” “fight,” “impasse,” and “crisis” (p. 210). Scholars have found the coverage of abortion policy to focus on conflict-laden language and division as well (Andsager, 2000; Simon & Jerit, 2007).

Entman (1997), finally, observed a powerful relationship between conflict-framing and language in news on affirmative action policy. As he observed,

[Although] the information environment was rich enough to enable elites and the mass public to reason through the issue... the media selected and highlighted with vivid and distinct verbal and visual messages the dominant theme of high-intensity emotional conflict of interest between mutually-antagonistic whites and African-Americans (p. 35).

Because conflict was perceived to attract readers, the media ignored the zone of potential compromise that existed, choosing to instead select and highlight claims by sources with an interest in promoting an inaccurate environment of “clashing racial interests” (p. 36).

Many scholars have found conflict-framing in coverage of health care policy as well. As Marmor (2000) observed, “the government’s role in financing health services activates emotional and bitter cleavages between liberals and conservatives” (p. 17), and media coverage reflects this. Conrad and McIntush (2003) found much conflict-framing tied to economics, specifically congressional actors’ disagreements over cost increase predictions and the free market, while Lepre et al. (2003) observed an emphasis on the “David-vs.-Goliath” fights between citizens and insurance providers at public hearings.

Coverage of Clinton’s HSA was also rife with the conflict frame. Koch (1998) credited media coverage of the conflict presented by Republicans, the insurance industry,

and business groups with the bill's defeat, and Pan and Kosicki (2001) also noted that this "oppositional discursive community" made conflict-framing a natural choice for the media (p. 55). As Hacker (1997) added, "The media devoted much of their attention to the claims and counterclaims surrounding the plan, since conflict is the staple of their reporting" (p. 148), and many others observed that reform opponents enhanced the media's conflict-framing capacity (Cobb & Kuklinski, 1997; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Skocpol, 1996; West et al., 1996).

Jamieson and Cappella (1998) observed an "us versus them" focus even though Democrats' and Republicans' bills were all against denying coverage for preexisting conditions and for "portability," and noted that seven proposed bills were narrowed down to two in order to concoct a "two-sided clash." As they observed, coverage proved the media's "fatal attraction to two-sided conflict. Because controversy is the stuff of which news is made, the public was not shown the emerging consensus on which legislation is built (p. 114). Fallows (1996) agreed, noting that conflict-framing overshadowed the parties' agreement on the need for lower costs, universal access, and greater patient choice.

The media's actual construction of conflict was detected by Johnson and Broder (1996), who found that the media consistently overplayed "leaks" from the Democrat-dominated health care task force in an effort to rile up Republicans. Jamieson and Cappella (1998) and Lieberman (1994) found the same tendency, noting that while the media chose to report a dramatic inter-party clash between President Clinton and Jim Cooper, whose proposed bills had the respective support of 100 and 57 almost entirely

Democratic congressmen, House Minority leader Bob Mitchel's compromise bill, which had 141 bipartisan backers, went largely unreported.

Jamieson and Cappella (1998) noted their surprise, however, that the two major political parties played a "comparatively small role" in coverage. The groups that did play a large role, however, were clearly those who lent themselves well to the conflict frame. The authors (1998) noted that forces opposing reform received disproportionate coverage, and found that the anti-reform Business Roundtable and Chamber of Commerce, which received 11 times the coverage of the pro-Clinton AFL-CIO, were proof of "the strategic advantage reporters give to those who attack" (p. 119).

Yet no coverage more clearly presented the media's concentration on conflict than that of the HIAA's "Harry" and "Louise." Jamieson and (1998) found that "Harry" and "Louise" appeared in 757 television and print news stories, with "Louise" included in more headlines (16) than any politician. Coverage of the anti-reform characters served to amplify the conflict environment surrounding the HSA (Cobb & Kuklinski, 1997; West et al., 1996), and Jamieson and Cappella (1998) noted that the media's conflict-framing was further buttressed when President Clinton began to criticize it. Corrigan (2000) went so far as to suggest that the plentiful conflict-framed coverage of "Harry" and "Louise" played a pivotal role in the bill's defeat, and Conrad and McIntush (2003) likewise concluded that, through the media coverage that it strategically spurred, the HIAA successfully "doomed the Clinton plan to fail" (p. 414).

Thus, whether amplified or created, the conflict frame was not only a staple of the media's health care reform coverage, but was likely more influential than any other type.

## Policy Framing

One can argue that, whether due to perceived newsworthiness or precedent, a journalist could justifiably defend an application of the issue-, econ-, game-, or conflict frame when covering any policy debate, and especially one as multidimensional as that over health care reform.

Given their ideal of social responsibility and democratic function, the media may indeed offer the issue and econ frames. As Bennett (2009) remarks, “For all its flaws, the American media can produce impressive levels of good information and public deliberation, leading publics and policymakers to helpful understandings of complex social problems” (p. 15). Graber et al. (1998) agree, stating that “The unwritten rules of democratic political culture command that news media devote time and space to the policy agenda in order to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of policy proposals” (p. 3).

Yet given the economic pressures of the news media, journalists may also see the game and conflict frames as the “emotional and immediate” news frames that, while downplaying information, build audiences (Bennett, 2009, p. 21; Sparrow, 1999). As McManus (1992) stated, “the logic of maximizing return [may] conflict with the logic of maximizing public understanding” (p. 90), and it may be the case that, as Graber et al. (1998) contend, “The balance between the media’s traditional public role in democratic society and their private commercial imperatives is being severely disturbed” (p. 253).

Given the preceding review of policy-framing research, this seems to be the case; for while the multi-dimensionality of policy issues suggest that multiple frames can exist not only across coverage but within individual news articles themselves – and research suggests that they do – it’s clear that the less informative frames predominate. Thus, with

no reason to believe that newspapers, as the object of analysis of this study, would cover the 2009-2010 health care reform debate any differently than other public policy issues or health care debates of the past, this study hypothesizes:

**H1: Elite newspapers will offer more game and conflict frames than issue and economic consequences frames in coverage of the 2009 health care reform debate.**

It is also worth considering, however, that different frames may dominate at different times. As Lawrence (2000) remarked,

Timing of news frames may be as important as the question of their overall predominance. Reporters typically apply certain frames to certain news context: When bills are being debated, news stories emphasize the strategy and progress of the political game; when bills become law, the substantive issues at stake are more fully explored... news organizations reserve the bulk of their substantive reporting until after the political game in Washington has reached its final phase. In the case of welfare reform, the bulk of substantive new coverage came after bill was “*a fait accompli*” (p. 108).

Also recalling Jamieson and Cappella (1998), who found what little substantive coverage existed at the beginning of the debate, and Kohut et al. (1995), who reported that game-framed coverage only increased as the debate wore on, this study also hypothesizes:

**H2: The proportion of game and conflict frames will rise during the course of the debate, while that of the issue and econon frames will fall.**

### **Information Sources**

In all news content and as specifically noted in many of the preceding policy-related studies (Andsager, 2000; Conrad & Millay, 2001; Entman, 1997; Simon & Jerit, 2007), sources of information may support a specific media frame. This study thus included an analysis of the sources utilized by the media both generally and in particular frames. As such, a brief review of sources' influence on framing is in order.



### **Sources as frame-builders.**

Because journalists rely on sources for information, perspectives, and balance, they are influential in news construction. They play such an integral role in the news, in fact, that Sigal (1987) defined news as “not what journalists think but what their sources say” (p. 29), and Gans (1979) stated that “news is information that is transmitted from sources to audiences, with journalists summarizing, refining, and altering what becomes available to them from sources” (p. 80). Entman (2004) similarly argued that news is composed of the “selective, framed communications” of political actors (p. 12), while Bennett (2009) defined news as “what newsmakers promote as timely, important, or interesting, from which news organizations select, narrate, and package for delivery to people who consume it” (p. 19).

Sources may thus influence the media’s framing. They may do so quite passively, with journalists seeking out and quoting sources that fit their chosen frame. More often, however, journalists may “serve as a conduit for the public communiqués of others” (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001, p. 186), disseminating sources’ chosen frames and offering an “acoustical boost for politicians’ messages” (Baker, 1998). In doing so, news is not so much a journalist’s “construction of reality” but more “a sampling of sources’ portrayals of reality, mediated by news organizations” (Sigal, 1987, p. 27). As Molotch and Lester (1974) argue, the news is therefore framed, above all, by sources.

Archetti (2007) explained this source-framing connection astutely:

News was found to be strongly shaped by sources who frame issues within the news. News contents are not created by the ‘media’ as if it were an actor with a will of its own. News coverage is, instead, constructed. It is the result of a framing competition among the different sources. News, more precisely, is doubly

constructed. It is physically put together by editors and journalists during the news-making process and it is further constructed, in meaning, by the sources framing each specific issue within news stories (p. 98).

Media frames thus reflect “a struggle over the right to define and shape issues, as well as the discourse surrounding these issues” (Pan and Kosicki, 2001, p. 36). This struggle may be especially common in public policy debates given their reliance on public opinion (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Elster, 1998; Page, 1996). As Gamson and Modigliani (1989) stated, “On policy issues, there are competing packages available. Indeed, one can view policy issues as, in part, a symbolic contest over which interpretation will prevail” (p. 2). Entman (2004) viewed policy debates similarly, conceptualizing a source-framing process in which political elites offer claims and counterclaims in an attempt to “win the framing contest and gain the upper hand politically” (p. 9).

Speaking further as to why this is the case regarding policy, Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1992) defined the source-framing process as one by which “a source defines the essential problem underlying a particular social or political issue and outlines a set of considerations purportedly relevant to that issue” (p. 222). Also tying sources to policy framing, Koch (1998) added:

In political conflict over resources, each side attempts to convince a significant proportion of the citizenry of the correctness of its position. Political elites attempt to mobilize public opinion to their advantage by framing the issue in terms that will move public opinion in the direction they desire (p. 209).

As such, political “elites” have been found to attempt to transmit their frames into the public sphere in order to win public support for their positions in policy debates (Gans, 1979; McManus, 1994; Reese, Grant, & Danielian, 1994; Zaller, 1992), including those over health care. Walsh-Childers et al. (1999), for example, generally asserted that

“When the subject is health care, government officials have the dominant voice” (p. 9), while Jamieson and Cappella (1998) found that interest groups and Republicans successfully transmitted an anti-reform frame in coverage of the HSA.

It is worthwhile, then, to consider not only which specific elite sources were considered most newsworthy in media coverage of health care reform, but also what other voices might have made their way into the news. This study will thus examine what sources were quoted or had information attributed to them most, most often appeared in stories framed in various ways, and finally how the prevalence of sources may have changed over time. A wealth of research exists to structure these considerations.

### ***The president.***

The president is the most newsworthy subject of American media coverage and, thanks to his “instantaneous access to all news media whenever he wants it” (Gans, 1979, p. 119), can attempt to influence what policies the public and Congress consider important (Cohen, 1995; Kernell, 1986). He can also often seek support for policy changes through persuasive framing (Neustadt, 1990), attempting to lead public opinion and thereby influence members of Congress (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Cook, 1989, p. 151; Edwards, 1983, 1989; Fett, 1994; Kingdon, 1995; Riker, 1986; Rosen, 1973).

Thus, as Page and Shapiro (1992) conclude,

On an issue he cares about, a president can hammer away with repeated speeches and statements and can expect to achieve a 5 or 10 percentage point change in public opinion over the course of several months... Moreover, he can probably exert additional (indirect) influence upon the public by persuading other opinion leaders [i.e., congressmen] to take similar stands (p. 349).

While a president may attempt to do so at any time, this seems likeliest during the early stages of a presidency given that “If the press characterizes a policy option one way

early on in the decision-making process, it is very difficult for officials to turn that image around to their preferred perspective” (Linsky, 1986, p. 94). In addition, a litany of scholars has noted the likelihood of presidents’ public outreach successfully swaying public opinion – and actually influencing Congress to vote for a policy (Kingdon, 1989; Conley, 2001) – when the president enjoys a high approval rating (Edwards, 1983; Kernell, 1983; Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987; Sigelman, 1980), most often at the onset of a president’s term (Sullivan, 1980).

Thus a well-timed, active, ambitious, and publically- and congressionally-supported president can occupy the central role in the policymaking process, greatly enhancing the likelihood of a desired policy outcome (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Carmines & Stimson, 1986; Conley, 2001; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Jones, 1995; Kingdon, 1995; Neustadt, 1990; Page & Shapiro, 1984; Riker, 1986; Schneider & Teske, 1995). Indeed, scholars have often observed presidents’ attempts to frame policy.

In terms of health care policy, President Johnson did so by successfully framing Medicare and Medicaid as economic necessities in 1964 (Chard, 2004), while President Clinton more recently and less successfully attempted to frame reform as an economic necessity by taking the proposal directly to the public and going so far as to enlist focus groups to develop framing terms that would build public support (Hacker, 1997). Thus regardless of the result, scholars have exhibited that, due to both their newsworthiness and their perceived ability to influence public opinion and thus policy outcomes, the president and other members of his administration may often serve as media sources.

### *Congress & other politicians.*

Although the president may possess the potential to frame policy more than any other single political actor in the U.S., when covering policymaking, essential sources also include House and Senate members. Politicians enjoy and seek coverage, Cook (1989) and Hess (1986) note, because it is integral to modern-era politics. According to Hess (1986),

Trying to use the media to get legislation through Congress is a Rube Goldberg design based on (A) legislator influencing (B) reporter to get information into (C) news outlets so as to convince (D) voters who will then put pressure on (E) other legislators (p. 103).

Just as is true for the president, then, congressmen or entire partisan parties desire to frame an issue in their own terms in order to hopefully influence the opinions of constituents and fellow lawmakers alike (Cook, 1989; Gans, 1979; Kendrowski, 1996).

What really sets congressional sources apart is thus not how media-savvy or well-spoken they are, but rather how important a part they play in the legislative and framing process (Cohodas, 1987). As a result, numerous trends of coverage have been found. Among them, Senate members have consistently been found to supersede House members in coverage (Cook, 1988, 1989; Dennis & Snyder, 1998; Elving, 1994, 1998; Hess, 1986; Miller, 1977); representatives in each chamber who are crucial to “moving the process along,” for example the Speaker of the House and the Senate majority and minority leaders, receive more coverage than their peers; and, while the majority party regularly received more coverage than the minority party, both are included in an effort to achieve objectivity (McManus, 1994; Patterson, 1998; Tuchman, 1978).

Thus individual representatives of both houses and parties, their spokespersons and aides, unspecific representatives (e.g., “House Republicans” or “Senate Democrats”),

and perhaps even non-congressional Democrats and Republicans (e.g. governors) are candidates of coverage.

***Interest groups.***

While the president and congressmen dominate political coverage in general and may likely dominate health care reform coverage, interest groups, while often absent from most news coverage, are common when the media covers policy. Stone (1997), for example, wrote that “on policy issues of any significance, groups coalesce and divide over policy proposals, depending on how they expect the proposal to affect them, and use individuals as their spokesmen” (p. 27). Andsager (2000) echoed that “in political debate over social issues, interest groups often play a major role in allowing individuals to gain access to important others, such as their congressional representatives, and to engage a broad slice of the public via the media (p. 577). Interest groups, then, may have tried to play an active role in the health care reform debate, as many scholars have previously observed (Nelson, 2008, 2006; Shull, 1999; Herrnson, Shaiko, & Wilcox, 1998).

Like political actors, groups may go public, producing press releases and ads in an attempt to frame policy in positive or negative terms, thereby moving public opinion (Schattschneider, 1960; Terkildsen, Schnell, & Ling, 1997). They can be the “cluster” that compels policy change (Olson, 1965) or, more often, the key players who seek to maintain the status quo (Conrad & McIntush, 2003; Kingdon, 1995).

Regarding the financially-implicative area of health care policy, both pro- and anti-reform groups have been found to offer frames in an attempt to influence the public, congressmen, and outcomes (Aaron, 1996; Weissert & Weissert, 2002; Morone & Jacobs, 2005). As Manheim (1998) remarked regarding the HSA,

In the major public policy battles – perhaps most notably in the battle over health care policy early in the first Clinton administration – communication strategists have been employed by industry and interest groups to create and generate support for versions of reality supporting their respective goals (p. 104).

As Koch (1998) echoed, “The primary strategy employed by supporters and opponents of Clinton’s health insurance reform effort was to highlight and characterize specific features of the proposal that might move public opinion in their favor” (p. 210). Anti-reform interest groups garnered the bulk of media coverage (Cappella & Jamieson, 1998; Conrad & McIntush, 2003), with the power of effective framing demonstrated most strongly by the HIAA’s Harry and Louise ads (West et al., 1996).

As such, many groups directly tied to health care reform – e.g., insurance companies, organized labor groups, business associations, and physicians’ groups – may have attempted to frame the debate and sway the public and policymakers in 2009. Importantly, less directly opinionated groups, for example government organizations and agencies, think tanks, other non-governmental organizations – and the individuals who speak for them – might also serve as sources.

### *Everyday & expert citizens.*

Although they lack both the authority of political actors and the financial power and advertising ability of interest groups, everyday and expert citizens are a last potential source in health care coverage. Even if rarely quoted directly, the media might choose to express the views of everyday citizens through opinion polls and general statements, thereby offering frames “with an eye toward how public preferences on the issue are distributed” (Callaghan & Schnell, 2001, p. 199).

Gans (1979) stressed the need for news that includes opinions of “citizens in various walks of life who would be affected by policies” (p. 313), and Cook (1989) called

for “perspectives besides those provided by Washington” (p. 177). Such is rare, however, with numerous scholars condemning the lack of a citizen voice in political coverage as a detriment to democracy (i.e. Bennett, 2009; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Entman, 1989, 1993). Outside of the field of communication, Dahl (1950) long ago pointed to the growing control of information by elites as the single greatest obstacle to the development of citizen participation in the policymaking process.

Indeed, scholars have found citizens to be the missing voice in media coverage of health care reform. Jamieson and Cappella (1998), for example, found citizens fully absent from coverage, only indirectly represented by advocacy groups. Similarly, Walsh-Childers et al. (1999) found citizens to be the least likely source in coverage of the HSA, and Lepre et al. (2003) found journalists to rely solely “on advocacy group spokespersons to voice consumers’ concerns” about potential reforms (pp. 15, 16).

Even so, there are rare instances when everyday citizens may make policy news. Bennett’s (1990) “indexing” theory, most applicably, suggests that while political voices dominate, “media professionals tend to ‘index’ the range of voices and viewpoints according to the range of views expressed in government debate about a given topic” (p. 106). Therefore while politicians frame the boundaries of an issue or debate, citizens who express views within those boundaries may be afforded coverage. Citizens, then, may be most likely appear when “open conflict” breaks out among key decision makers, and Gans (1979) supported this contention in observing that “ordinary citizens appear in the news most often when they act in opposition to government policies” (pp. 13-14).

Importantly, however, not all citizens are utilized as sources for their everyday perspective and opinions, but may serve as sources because their professional positions



allow them to provide useful information to the media and readers. Regarding health care, such citizens might include professors, doctors, or professionals in the economic sector who are directly affiliated with neither a political party nor an interest group. Between the public perspective offered by everyday citizens and the expert perspective offered by this latter group, the media may indeed include citizen sources.

### **The Sources of 2009-2010 Health Care Coverage**

Without question, sources frame the news and there is no doubt that President Obama and members of his administration, specific and unspecific House and Senate Democrats and Republicans, various interest groups, and everyday or expert citizens could all serve as sources in health care reform coverage. However, little research exists to inform specific hypotheses about their overall prominence, much less their prominence in certain frames or over the course of coverage. This study's research question thus asks:

**R1(a): What sources were quoted or had information attributed to them in media coverage; (b) what sources appeared most frequently in predominantly issue-, econ-, game-, or conflict-framed articles; and (c) how did each sources' prominence change over time?**

## Method

To gather data for this study, a content analysis of newspaper articles was conducted. Newspapers were chosen because print media covered the HSA longer than television (Kohut et al., 1995) and because, according to Underwood (1998), newspapers lead the news media:

Although the public doesn't realize it, daily newspapers are at the base of the information pyramid in the modern media age, and much of the serious news and information that is used by broadcasters, rewritten by the wire services, and repackaged by new media providers originates in newspaper reporting (p. 175).

As such, newspapers were assumed to offer not only the best coverage available, but also coverage that, whether directly or indirectly, reached a wide audience.

This seemed especially likely regarding this study's sampled sources: *The L.A. Times (LAT)*, *The N.Y. Times (NYT)*, and *The Washington Post (WP)*. Such a contention is valid in part because these papers each have free news web sites, making it likely that their content reaches more eyes than their circulation numbers suggest. Yet the *LAT*, *NYT* and *WP* do enjoy a large readership, with respective daily circulations of 723,181, 1.04 million and 665,383 (Wilkerson, 2009). What's more, these papers are influential; many have observed the inter-media agenda-setting effect of the *NYT* and *WP* (Danielian & Reese, 1989; Golan, 2006; Rogers, Dearing, & Chang, 1991), and each source was included in the most in-depth past studies of health care reform (Jamieson & Cappella, 1998; Kohut et al., 1995). It was thus concluded that these newspapers would offer a sample of content representing the types of frames that many Americans received in coverage of the 2009 health care reform debate, and if they did not offer citizens the information required to form public opinion, few citizens were likely offered this at all.

To determine how the 2009-2010 health care reform debate was framed, the individual newspaper article was considered the unit of analysis. All articles to be analyzed were retrieved from the Lexis-Nexis database. The sample was produced from a search for articles whose contents included “health care” (in their lead for the *NYT* and *WP*, but not for the *LAT*) and which appeared between February 24, 2009, and March 23, 2010. To limit the sample to articles in the newspapers’ national news sections, search terms included “MAIN NEWS” and “National Desk” for the *LAT*, “National Desk” for the *NYT*, and “A-Section” for the *WP*.

The study was limited to the national news sections of newspapers because business section articles could heavily skew the findings in favor of the econ frame, while opinion pieces would not reflect the newspapers’ reporting. The specific time period was chosen because February 24, 2009, was considered to mark the beginning of President Obama’s health care reform initiative (e.g., see A.P.), while March 23, 2010 marked the conclusion of the health care reform debate in the form of President Obama’s signing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Based on the health care timeline provided by the Associated Press (AP), this time period was further broken down into T1 (2/24/09 to 7/31/09, when the House passed the first version of its health care bill); T2 (8/1/09 to 9/1/09, when Congress recessed and town halls were held across the country); T3 (9/2/09, when Congress reconvened, to 10/15/09, when the Senate Finance Committee passed its bill); T4 (10/16/09 to 12/25/2010, the day after the Senate passed its bill); and finally T5 (12/26/09 to 3/23/10, when President Obama signed a final bill). While unequal in duration, these time periods

mark potential turning points in the debate, and their analysis helped determine how the media's framing changed over time.

Under these specific search criteria, total articles were first retrieved through T4 (12/25/09), with 286 from the *LAT*, 580 from the *NYT*, and 401 from the *WP* after eliminating duplicates, abstracts, corrections, and non-reform articles (for example, those about H1N1). Along with all *LAT* articles, 300 articles were randomly selected from the *NYT* and *WP* using a systematic sampling technique. At a later date, the total populations of each newspapers' articles published during T5 was added to the sample, bringing the final number of analyzed articles to 1,139, with 346 from the *LAT*, 411 from the *NYT*, 382 from the *WP*; and with 226 from T1, 136 from T2, 236 from T3, 260 from T4, and 281 from T5.

The categories of this content analysis were designed to capture both manifest characteristics of the articles and more subjective characteristics. The manifest variables coded in this study are (2) story number, (3) publication date of story, (4) time period of story publication, (5) origin of the news story, and (6) total number of paragraphs in the story. Also in this category was (7) total number of paragraphs in which each source type was quoted or had information attributed to it. The less explicit framing variable to be coded was predominant frame in each paragraph, later recorded as the total number of (8) issue-framed, (9) ecocon-framed, (10) game-framed, and (11) conflict-framed paragraphs.

While scholars have coded the frames of news articles by simply analyzing the headline (Graber, 1987) or recording the presence or absence of multiple frames (e.g., Stromback & Dimitrova, 2006), the researcher sought to assess the relative salience of

different frames. Thus paragraphs, which “The conventions of newspaper journalism dictate as the smallest unit of meaning” (Jasperson et al., 1998, p. 211), were chosen as the coding unit because they would allow the researcher to account for multiple frames as well as objectively measure the article’s predominant frame. Such a coding scheme also made sense given that source analysis required a full reading of each article.

As stated, the researcher acknowledged that multiple sources and frames may likely exist not only within the article, but perhaps within a paragraph. Coders thus recorded the total number of paragraphs in which each source type was directly quoted, whether in the present or past tense, or had information directly attributed to it through words such as “claimed” and “said.” Importantly, the same specific source (e.g., Senator Harry Reid (D)) was counted for each paragraph in which it was a source, while a paragraph in which two different members of the same source type (e.g., Harry Reid and Max Baucus) served as sources counted for two Senate Democrat paragraphs. Further directions on the coding of sources were provided to coders (See Appendix I).

When coding frames, coders classified each paragraph as predominantly issue-, econ-, game-, conflict-framed, or “other” (any paragraph in which none of these frames is predominant). They then summed up the total number of paragraphs with each frame in each article, and recorded that number under “total issue frame,” “total econ frame,” “total game frame,” and “total conflict frame.”

Borrowing from Cappella and Jamieson (1997), the issue frame was defined as focusing on health care policy problems and solutions; the substance of legislation or proposed legislation; politicians’ stands or statements on policy legislation; and the general (non-economic) implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for

the public. From Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), paragraphs were coded under the ecocon frame if there was (a) a mention of cost/degree of expense involved; (b) a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing an action (e.g., on the budget, taxes, or personal spending); or (c) a mention of savings now or in the future. References to how economic conditions call for policy change, how to pay for policy, or the economic implications of various aspects of proposed legislation were also included.

The definition of the game frame also came from Cappella and Jamieson (1997), and was present if the text focused on politicians winning or losing; politicians' (or other groups') strategies for winning (e.g., legislative maneuvers or advertising campaigns); the implications (e.g. electoral) of legislative debates for politicians and parties; specific legislative developments (e.g., the advancement of a bill); or the implications of developments for the ultimate passage of legislation. The frame was also coded if the paragraph stressed the roles or votes of specific politicians, voting "scores," alliances, negotiations, and/or compromises. Lastly, given the frame's inclusion of process, it was also coded if the paragraph focused on what's to come (e.g., the next "step/hurdle") or how legislative action moved (e.g., "impasse/gridlock/stall"). Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) conflict frame was adopted, with paragraphs coded as such if they (a) reflected disagreement between parties, individuals, or groups; (b) included the rapprochement of one party, individual, or group by another; (c) referred to two sides of the problem/issue; or (d) emphasized the achievements or actions of one individual, party, or group versus another's.

Coders were provided with expanded versions of these definitions and examples of article paragraphs in which each frame was predominant, as well as directions on how

to code sources and every other variable on the coding sheet (see Appendix I for coding instructions and Appendix II for coding sheet). To account for the detailed nature of coding sources and the potentially subjective nature of the four frames, intercoder reliability, the extent to which two coders agree on coding content variables, was assessed. To do so, four coding assistants read the full codebook and definitions and discussed their preliminary questions and concerns with the researcher.

At this point, it became clear that each of the four coders shared a primary concern regarding the differentiation between the issue and economic consequences frames. This was understandable given the nature of public policy legislation, and the researcher decided to collapse the two frames. This was deemed acceptable and in fact preferable for multiple reasons. First, neither Jamieson and Cappella (1997) nor Kohut et al. (1995) separated the issue and economic consequences frames when analyzing the Clinton-era health care reform debate, and personal correspondence revealed that the former authors felt that the issue frame encompassed the economic consequences frame in the context of policy coverage.

Secondly, the researcher quickly noticed that a clear majority of information-providing paragraphs seemed to blend the two frames. Such paragraphs ran the gamut, including those in which the journalist discussed specific issues and their contribution to costs; pieces of potential legislation and how they would affect both the government's and individual citizens' costs; and how various facets of the Senate's and House's legislation (e.g. having the public option or not) affected the estimates from the Congressional Budget Office. More specifically, such paragraphs may have included discussions of the unnecessary costs contributed by lawsuits and defensive medicine; the

economic stresses of individuals resulting from losing employer-provided health insurance or being denied due to a preexisting condition; the cost-cutting potential of electronic records; or the costs of immigrants' emergency room usage as compared to that of requiring patients to verify their legal status.

In addition, it also became clear that virtually any discussion of how to pay for legislation, which would fit under the economic consequences frame, would in fact represent a discussion of the substance of potential legislation, which would suggest an issue-framed paragraph. The issue/ecocon frame was thus created to represent an overarching frame that focused on the economic or non-economic reasons for legislation, the economic or non-economic substance of legislation, and/or the economic or non-economic consequences of legislation.

With this important change made, the four coders independently coded a combined total of 180 articles (with 60 from each newspaper), each of which the researcher independently coded as well. Intercoder reliability for all variables was calculated using Pearson correlations. The reliability coefficient for date of publication, time period, and total paragraphs was 1.00. Many of the source-framing variables, specifically president, Senate Dem./Ind./Rep., House Dem./Rep., unspecific Dem./Rep., non-congressional Dem./Rep., and media, all produced a coefficient of 1.00 as well. Source-framing variables with coefficients under 1.00 included total interest groups per article (.996), total think tanks/NGOs per article (.982), total government organizations per article (.978), total citizens per article (.983), total experts per article (.988), and total other sources per article (.978). Framing variables resulted in high agreement as well; coefficients were .992 for the total number of issue/ecocon framed paragraphs per article,



.990 for the total number of game-framed paragraphs per article, .980 for the total number of conflict-framed paragraphs per article, and .972 for the total number of other framed paragraphs per article.

These numbers were taken to represent a very high level of overall and story-by-story agreement. To be sure, disagreements did occur on a regular basis. Intercoder agreement was often 100% in shorter articles, however, and when one or two total paragraphs were in question they were most often in longer articles, therefore producing little impact on each variable's intercoder reliability score. In addition, the high scores can likely be attributed in part to the fact that paragraph totals were compared, meaning that disagreements on specific paragraphs would matter little if these totals were similar. Given that the researcher was primarily interested in the total balance of frames and the overall dominant frame, however, agreement on paragraph totals was what mattered, and the researcher thus continued to independently code all remaining articles.

## Results

H1 predicted that newspapers would offer more game and conflict frames than issue and econcon frames. When testing summed game- and conflict-framed paragraphs versus issue/econcon-framed paragraphs, H1 was supported; a paired-samples t-test revealed that 11.09 mean game/conflict-framed paragraphs per article was significantly greater than 7.68 mean issue/econcon-framed paragraphs per article ( $t = 8.89$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When independently testing game-framed and conflict-framed paragraphs versus issue/econcon-framed paragraphs, however, 8.18 average game-framed paragraphs per article did not significantly outnumbered 7.68 average issue/econcon-framed paragraphs per article, yet both 8.18 average game-framed paragraphs and 7.68 issue/econcon-framed paragraphs significantly outnumbered 2.91 average conflict-framed paragraphs (Table 1).

**Table 1: Paired-samples *t*-test of differences in mean frames per paragraph**

| Issue/Econcon Frames | Game Frames | Conflict Frames | <i>t</i> |
|----------------------|-------------|-----------------|----------|
| 7.68                 | 8.18        | NA              | -1.43    |
| 7.68                 | NA          | 2.91            | 18.54**  |
| NA                   | 8.18        | 2.91            | 22.85**  |

*N* = 1,139

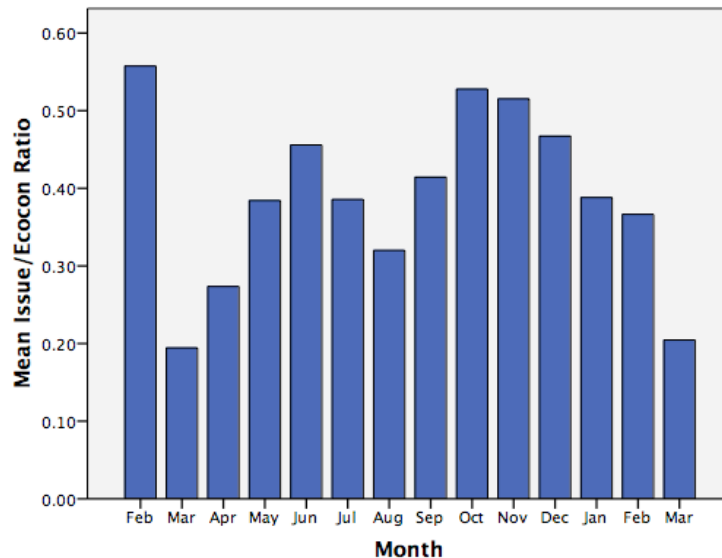
\*\* *t*-test indicates significant at  $p < .01$

An ANOVA model was estimated with the factor of “newspaper” and the dependent variables of each frame ratio (computed by dividing the total of each frame per article by the total number of paragraphs per article). Pairwise Bonferroni post-hoc multiple comparisons were estimated to test for any differences in the ratios of each frame within the three newspapers, and revealed no significant differences in framing between any of the newspapers. While no hypotheses were made regarding inter-newspaper relationships or differences, this test was very valuable in that it established the validity of categorizing the *LAT*, the *NYT*, and the *WP* as members of a distinct and largely homogenous group of newspapers.

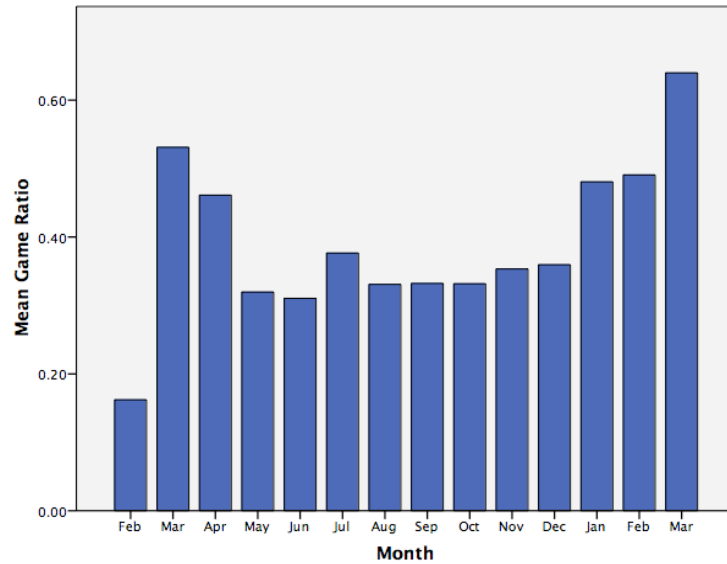
The second hypothesis predicted that the proportion of total game- and conflict-framed paragraphs per article would rise during the course of the debate, while the proportion of total issue/econ-framed paragraphs per article would be most prevalent at the debate's beginning and after its culmination. To investigate this, each of the three frames' ratios were first plotted over time (14 months) in order to visualize any trends.

The first graph (Figure 1) revealed that the average percentage of issue/econ frames per article steadily climbed to a first peak in June, fell to just above 30% in August, climbed to over 50% in September and remained above 40% for the last four months of the year, then fell to roughly 20% in March.

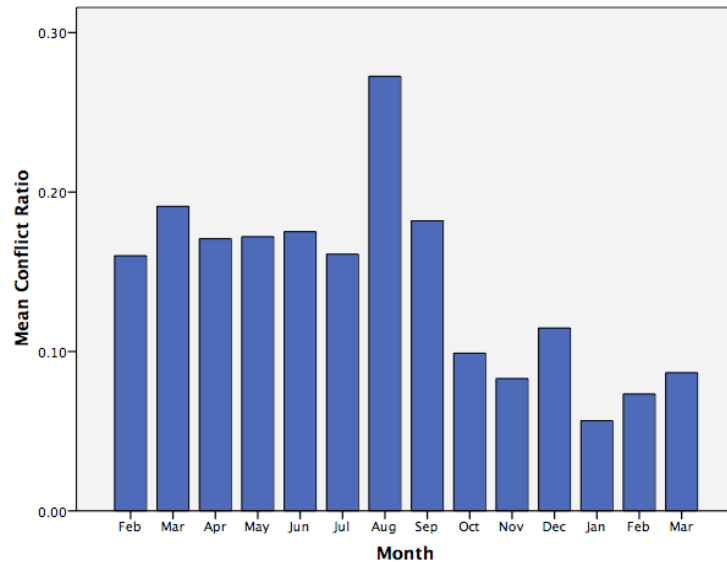
**Figure 1: Mean percentage of issue/econ-framed paragraphs per article per month**



The second graph (Figure 2) showed that the average percentage of game-framed paragraphs per article hovered between 30% and 35% after the first three months of the debate and rose to over 50% during T5, finally peaking at a high of 65% in March.

**Figure 2: Mean percentage of game-framed paragraphs per article per month**

Lastly, the third graph (Figure 3) revealed that the average percentage of conflict-framed paragraphs per article remained between 15% and 20% until rising to over 25% in August, after which point it fell to 10% or less for the debate's final six months.

**Figure 3: Mean percentage of conflict-framed paragraphs per article per month**

These ratio-over-time graphs seemed to offer mixed results regarding H2. Overall, the percentage of ecocon-framed paragraphs per article did not steadily fall over the course of the debate, but rather rose and fell. Similarly, the percentage of game-framed

and conflict-framed paragraphs did not steadily rise. The game frame was relatively consistent until peaking during the final time period, while the conflict frame peaked during one single month but actually declined from that point on.

To test the significance of the change in frames over time, the four overarching time periods were utilized (T1, 2/24/2009 to 7/31/2009; T2, 8/1/2009 to 9/1/2009; T3, 9/2/2009 to 10/15/2009; T4, 10/16/2009 to 12/25/2009; and T5, 12/26/09 to 3/23/10). These five time periods, the “time” variable, were entered as the factor in a one-way ANOVA model that included the dependent variables of the issue/ecocon frame ratio, the game frame ratio, and the conflict frame ratio. Pairwise Bonferroni post-hoc multiple comparisons were estimated, and revealed that each frame ratio did differ significantly between certain periods of the debate.

Specifically, the mean issue/ecocon ratio was significantly greater during T4 than T1, T2, and T5, as well as greater during T3 than T2. The mean game frame ratio was greater during T5 than T1, T2, T3, and T4. The conflict frame ratio was greater during T1 than T4 and T5; during T2 than T1, T3, T4, and T5; and during T3 than T4 and T5.

(Table 2). Again, these findings largely failed to support H2.

**Table 2: One-way ANOVA model of differences in mean frame ratios per time period**

| Dominant Frame | Ratio in T1 | Ratio in T2 | Ratio in T3 | Ratio in T4 | Ratio in T5 | <i>F</i>        |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Issue/Ecocon   | 0.39        | 0.32        | <u>0.45</u> | <u>0.49</u> | 0.33        | <b>14.064**</b> |
| Game           | 0.37        | 0.33        | 0.33        | 0.36        | <u>0.53</u> | <b>24.210**</b> |
| Conflict       | 0.17        | <u>0.27</u> | 0.16        | 0.09        | 0.07        | <b>46.775**</b> |

*N* = 1,139

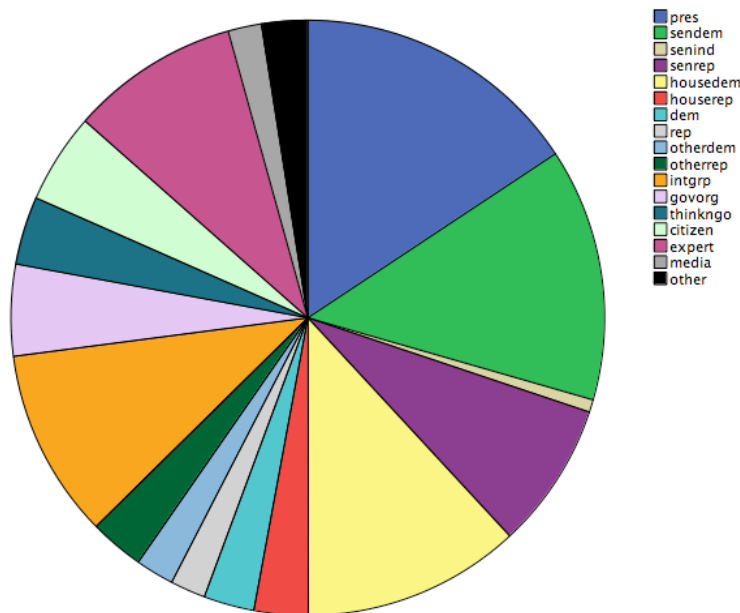
\*\* ANOVA indicates  $p < .01$

Considering sources, this study also asked a three-part research question about (a)

what sources were quoted or had information attributed to them in media coverage; (b) what sources appeared most frequently in predominantly issue/economic-, game-, or conflict-framed stories; and (c) how did sourcing changed over time.

Descriptive statistics were used to answer part a. They revealed that an average of 12.28 source attributions were made in the average article, the average length of which was 20.17 paragraphs. No source was represented in every article, and the source most represented in a single article was the president, who had information attributed to him or other administration sources 29 times in a single article and was the top source, averaging 2.14 attributions per article. Senate Democrats ran a close second (2.01), and were followed by House Democrats (1.65), interest groups (1.53), experts (1.35), Senate Republicans (1.18), citizens (0.77), government organizations (0.75), think tanks/NGOs (0.57), non-congressional Republicans (0.45), House Republicans (0.44), unspecific Democrats (0.40), non-congressional Democrats (0.32), media (0.29), unspecific Republicans (0.28), and Senate Independents (0.11). (See Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Source distribution**



In addition, after computing total Democratic and Republican sources (e.g., Senate Dems + House Dems + unspecific Dems + non-congressional Dems) and total Senate and House sources (e.g., House Dems + House Reps), paired-samples *t*-tests revealed that 3.74 mean Democratic sources per article outnumbered 1.94 mean Republican sources per article ( $t = 13.48, p < .01$ ) and 2.75 mean Senate sources per article outnumbered 1.82 mean House sources per article ( $t = 5.482, p < .01$ ).

Before investigating part b of the research question, a new variable, “dominant frame,” was coded. This involved coding “1” if issue/ecocon-framed paragraphs dominated in the article; “2” if game-framed paragraphs dominated; “3” if conflict-framed paragraphs dominated; and “0” if no single frame dominated. Of note, a simple frequency analysis showed that the issue/ecocon frame dominated 42.3% of articles (482); the game frame dominated 46.3% of articles (527); the conflict frame dominated 8.4% of articles (96); and no frame was dominant in just 3.0% of articles (34).

To investigate the interaction between an article’s dominant frame and the predominance of sources, “dominant frame” was entered as the factor in a one-way ANOVA model that included all source variables as dependent variables. Pairwise Bonferroni post-hoc multiple comparisons were estimated and revealed that all sources, with the exception of Senate Democrats and interest groups, appeared significantly more often in at least one type of dominantly framed article than another.

The president, Senate Independents and Republicans, House Democrats and Republicans, and unspecific Democrats and Republicans were sources in game-framed articles more than issue/ecocon-framed articles. Senate Republicans and House Democrats and Republicans were sources in conflict-framed articles more than

issue/ecocon-framed articles, while House Republicans were sources in conflict-framed articles more than game-framed articles as well. Non-congressional Democrats were sources in game-framed articles more than issue/ecocon-framed articles, while non-congressional Republicans were sources in conflict-framed articles more than issue/ecocon- and game-framed articles (Table 3).

Beyond partisan sources, government organizations and experts were sources in issue/ecocon-framed articles more than game- or conflict-framed articles, while think tanks/NGOs were also sources in issue/ecocon-framed articles more than game-framed articles. Citizens, on the other hand, were sources in conflict-framed articles more than issue/ecocon- or game-framed articles. The media, finally, served as a source in conflict-framed articles more than issue/ecocon- or game-framed articles, as well as in game-framed articles more than issue/ecocon-framed articles (Table 3).

Lastly, total Senators and House members were sources in game-framed articles more than issue/ecocon-framed articles, but House members were sources in conflict-framed articles more than issue/ecocon-framed articles as well. Total Democrats and Republicans both were sources in game-framed articles more than issue/ecocon-framed articles, yet while Democrats were also sources in game-framed articles more than conflict-framed articles, Republicans were sources in conflict-framed articles more than both issue/ecocon- and game-framed articles. One last variable, “info sources,” which was computed by adding experts, government organizations, and think tanks/NGOs, was found to be far more likely to be a source in issue/ecocon-framed articles than game- or conflict-framed articles (Table 3).



**Table 3: One-way ANOVA model of differences in sources' prominence in article types**

| Source/Type of Article | Issue/Ecocon-Framed Article | Game-Framed Article | Conflict-Framed Article | <i>F</i>        |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| President              | 1.51                        | <u>2.25</u>         | 2.12                    | 5.017**         |
| Senate Dem             | 1.45                        | 1.92                | 1.36                    | 3.315           |
| Senate Ind             | 0.03                        | <u>0.13</u>         | 0.08                    | 4.035**         |
| Senate Rep             | 0.71                        | 1.13                | <u>1.44</u>             | 5.378**         |
| House Dem              | 0.76                        | <u>2.11</u>         | 1.65                    | <b>20.600**</b> |
| House Rep              | 0.18                        | 0.39                | <u>1.06</u>             | <b>18.454**</b> |
| Unspecific Dem         | 0.22                        | <u>0.49</u>         | 0.22                    | <b>11.879**</b> |
| Unspecific Rep         | 0.17                        | <u>0.30</u>         | 0.25                    | 4.039**         |
| Non-cong. Dem.         | 0.11                        | <u>0.41</u>         | 0.21                    | <b>10.266**</b> |
| Non-cong. Rep.         | 0.22                        | 0.41                | <u>0.93</u>             | 8.105**         |
| Interest Group         | 1.35                        | 1.18                | 1.38                    | 0.712           |
| GovOrg(s)              | <u>1.16</u>                 | 0.19                | 0.23                    | <b>41.718**</b> |
| Thinktank/NGO          | <u>0.64</u>                 | 0.31                | 0.39                    | 6.707**         |
| Citizen(s)             | 0.51                        | 0.42                | <u>2.05</u>             | <b>16.018**</b> |
| Expert(s)              | <u>1.84</u>                 | 0.57                | 0.75                    | <b>22.143**</b> |
| Media                  | 0.09                        | 0.27                | <u>0.67</u>             | <b>12.975**</b> |
| Total Senators         | 2.19                        | <u>3.19</u>         | 2.89                    | 4.984**         |
| Total House            | 0.94                        | <u>2.50</u>         | <u>2.71</u>             | <b>22.114**</b> |
| Total Dems             | 2.54                        | <u>4.93</u>         | 3.44                    | <b>29.968**</b> |
| Total Reps             | 1.28                        | <u>2.24</u>         | <u>3.68</u>             | <b>23.925**</b> |
| Info Sources           | <u>3.64</u>                 | 1.07                | 1.36                    | <b>58.149**</b> |

*N* = 1,139

\*\* ANOVA indicates significant at  $p < .01$

To address part c of the research question, a one-way ANOVA model (with “time” entered as the factor and all source variables entered as dependent variables) with pairwise Bonferroni post-hoc multiple comparisons was again utilized to investigate the significance of changes in each sources' prominence over time. As was the case with sources' prominence in articles primarily framed in a certain way, the majority of sources (all sources except for total Republicans, government organizations, think tanks/NGOs, experts, and the cumulative “info sources”) did differ significantly in prominence between at least two of the five time periods of the debate (Table 4).

**Table 4: One-way ANOVA model of mean differences in sources' prominence over time**

| Source/Time    | T1          | T2          | T3          | T4          | T5          | F               |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| President      | 2.79        | 2.34        | 1.84        | <u>0.74</u> | 2.21        | <b>15.268**</b> |
| Senate Dem     | 1.86        | 1.20        | 1.63        | <u>2.81</u> | 0.79        | <b>19.441**</b> |
| Senate Ind     | 0.02        | 0.08        | 0.02        | <u>0.27</u> | 0.01        | <b>13.510**</b> |
| Senate Rep     | 1.18        | 1.01        | 1.02        | 1.11        | <u>0.64</u> | 2.710*          |
| House Dem      | 1.27        | 0.99        | 1.12        | 1.09        | <u>2.46</u> | <b>12.256**</b> |
| House Rep      | 0.23        | 0.21        | 0.39        | 0.29        | <u>0.59</u> | 4.968**         |
| Unspecific Dem | 0.31        | 0.24        | 0.28        | 0.10        | <u>0.68</u> | <b>19.084**</b> |
| Unspecific Rep | 0.26        | 0.08        | 0.18        | 0.08        | <u>0.48</u> | <b>16.939**</b> |
| Non-cong. Dem  | 0.24        | <u>0.51</u> | 0.20        | 0.15        | 0.29        | 4.008**         |
| Non-cong. Rep  | 0.31        | 0.49        | <u>0.53</u> | 0.14        | 0.42        | 3.061*          |
| Interest Group | <u>1.77</u> | 1.15        | 1.15        | 1.25        | 1.02        | 3.340*          |
| GovOrg(s)      | 0.77        | 0.53        | 0.55        | 0.60        | 0.59        | 0.809           |
| Thinktank/NGO  | 0.53        | 0.60        | 0.45        | 0.41        | 0.37        | 1.187           |
| Citizen(s)     | 0.50        | <u>1.38</u> | 0.73        | 0.40        | 0.39        | 5.864**         |
| Expert(s)      | 1.24        | 1.00        | 1.05        | 1.12        | 1.16        | 0.251           |
| Media          | 0.23        | <u>0.51</u> | 0.22        | 0.14        | 0.15        | 4.919**         |
| Total Senators | 3.07        | 2.29        | 2.67        | <u>4.19</u> | 1.45        | <b>15.284**</b> |
| Total House    | 1.50        | 1.20        | 1.50        | 1.38        | <u>3.05</u> | <b>13.341**</b> |
| Total Dems     | 3.69        | 2.95        | 3.22        | 4.15        | <u>4.22</u> | 3.744**         |
| Total Reps     | 1.98        | 1.78        | 2.11        | 1.62        | 2.13        | 1.449           |
| Info Sources   | 2.54        | 2.13        | 2.06        | 2.13        | 2.12        | 0.734           |

*N* = 1,139

\* ANOVA indicates significant at  $p < .05$

\*\* ANOVA indicates significant at  $p < .01$

The president and administration officials were significantly less prominent during T4 than T1, T2, T3, and T5, and were also more prominent during T1 than T3. In stark contrast, Senate Democrats and Independents were more prominent during T4 than all other time periods. Senate Democrats were also more prominent during T3 than T5, whereas Senate Republicans were more prominent during T1 than T5. As for House members, House Democrats were more prominent during T5 than all other time periods, and House Republicans were more prominent during T5 than T1, T2, and T4. Unspecific Democrats and Republicans were both more prominent during T5 than all other periods, and were each also more prominent during T1 than T4. Non-congressional members of the two parties did not share such a similarity, however, as non-congressional Democrats

were more prominent during T2 than T3 and T4, while non-congressional Republicans were more prominent during T3 than T4.

Non-partisan sources differed in their prominence over time as well. Interest groups were more prominent during T1 than T5; citizens were more prominent during T2 than T1, T4, and T5; and the media was more prominent during T2 than during all other time periods. Lastly, senators were more prominent during T1 and T3 than T5, and during T4 than all other time periods, House members were more prominent during T5 than during all other periods, and Democrats were more prominent during T5 than T2.

A last one-way ANOVA model was run to also investigate any differences in the three newspapers' use of sources. Entering "paper" as the factor and all source variables as the dependent variables, pairwise Bonferroni post-hoc multiple comparisons revealed a number of significant differences. As Table 5 shows, both the *NYT* and the *WP* used Senate Democrats, total Senators, total House members, total Democrats, and total Republicans as sources more than the *LAT*. The *NYT* also used Senate Republicans more than the *LAT*, while the *WP* used House Democrats more than the *LAT*. The *NYT* used unspecific Democrats more than the *LAT*, and used unspecific Republicans more than the *WP*. As for non-partisan sources, both the *LAT* and the *WP* used think tanks/NGOs more than the *NYT*, while the *WP* used the media as a source more than the *NYT*.

**Table 5: One-way ANOVA model of mean differences in sources' prominence across newspapers**

| Source/Newspaper | <i>L.A. Times</i> | <i>N.Y. Times</i> | <i>Washington Post</i> | <i>F</i>        |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| President        | 1.87              | 1.80              | 2.12                   | 1.077           |
| Senate Dem       | 1.03              | <u>1.98</u>       | <u>1.97</u>            | <b>13.354**</b> |
| Senate Ind       | 0.10              | 0.09              | 0.07                   | 0.231           |
| Senate Rep       | 0.67              | <u>1.22</u>       | 1.00                   | 6.902**         |
| House Dem        | 1.08              | 1.56              | <u>1.68</u>            | 4.509*          |
| House Rep        | 0.26              | 0.39              | 0.43                   | 2.265           |
| Unspecific Dem   | 0.19              | <u>0.47</u>       | 0.33                   | <b>10.304**</b> |
| Unspecific Rep   | 0.20              | <u>0.31</u>       | 0.19                   | 3.966*          |
| Non-cong. Dem    | 0.23              | 0.22              | 0.32                   | 1.630           |
| Non-cong. Rep    | 0.40              | 0.28              | 0.42                   | 1.466           |
| Interest Group   | 1.24              | 1.16              | 1.40                   | 1.000           |
| GovOrg(s)        | 0.59              | 0.68              | 0.56                   | 0.787           |
| Thinktank/NGO    | <u>0.58</u>       | 0.27              | <u>0.54</u>            | 7.559**         |
| Citizen(s)       | 0.57              | 0.67              | 0.56                   | 0.353           |
| Expert(s)        | 1.00              | 1.08              | 1.29                   | 1.197           |
| Media            | 0.20              | 0.15              | <u>0.32</u>            | 3.965*          |
| Total Senators   | 1.80              | <u>3.28</u>       | <u>3.04</u>            | <b>12.864**</b> |
| Total House      | 1.34              | <u>1.95</u>       | <u>2.11</u>            | 5.276**         |
| Total Dems       | 2.54              | <u>4.23</u>       | <u>4.31</u>            | <b>21.302**</b> |
| Total Reps       | 1.53              | <u>2.19</u>       | <u>2.04</u>            | 5.362**         |
| Info Sources     | 2.18              | 2.03              | 2.38                   | 1.019           |

*N* = 1,139

\* ANOVA indicates significant at  $p < .05$

\*\* ANOVA indicates significant at  $p < .01$

## Discussion

### Summary, Significance, and Justifications of Results

Just as it was for former President Clinton, health care reform was clearly President Obama's chief domestic policy issue once he entered the White House. And, just as in 1993, health care reform was a dominant issue on the national agenda in 2009 and into 2010, receiving consistent attention from both the media and the public.

Yet in addition to the presidents', the media's, and the public's focus on this issue, health care reform in 1993 and 2009 share additional similarities. In both periods, for example, the debate centered on issues such as the public option and universal coverage, the President's proper role in the process, and the uncompromising nature of Democrats and Republicans in both the House and Senate. The clearest commonality, however, was likely the great emphasis placed on the media's coverage of reform, with polls reflecting the public's perception of coverage offering little information and much conflict both in 2009 (Pew, 9/8/2009 & 9/16/2009) and 1993 (Kohut et al., 1995).

Indeed, it would be tempting to simply assume that, as Jamieson and Cappella (1998) found regarding the Clinton-era debate, the media focused on strategy over substance, economic interests over social responsibility, and the voices of anti-reformists throughout their coverage of the 2009-2010 health care reform debate. Through a content analysis of 1,139 news articles, however, this study revealed that such broad assumptions cannot be supported.

On the whole, these three newspapers provided nearly as many articles (482, or 42.3%) primarily focused on the reasons for, substance of, and consequences of potential health care legislation as were primarily focused on the game, strategy, and/or process

surrounding the debate (527, or 46.3%). Yes, the three newspapers provided more cumulative paragraphs focused on the game, strategy, process, and/or conflict of the debate than the issues of health care reform itself, but there was no significant difference between issue/ecocon-framed and exclusively game-framed stories.

The newspapers placed little emphasis on conflict, which was dominant in just 8% of articles (96), and primarily and quite understandably reported it most during the month of August, when conflict emerged as health care reform reality at townhalls across the country. In contrast to numerous scholars' general assertions (e.g. Bennett, 2009; McManus, 1993) and the issue-specific findings of Jamieson and Cappella (1998), Kohut et al. (1995), and Pan and Kosicki (2001), the media did not seem to manufacture conflict to any great extent.

Regarding the game frame, it may have dominated more articles than any other frame, but 46.3% is a far cry from the roughly 67% of game-framed articles that Jamieson and Cappella (1998) observed in Clinton-era coverage. When one considers the wide scope of the game frame as defined in this study, the finding represents a virtual sea change. And while the game frame was not coded by its three specific sub-parts, it seemed clear that the majority of game-framed paragraphs focused on the policymaking process and the dispersion of votes rather than players and their strategies.

Though such a focus may not inform readers of potential legislation and the issues surrounding it, reporting these aspects of the game frame does offer the reader other useful information. A single senator's vote, for instance, may not be meaningful to all readers, but may be very meaningful to his or her constituent who will assess how accurately the representative reflects their views and vote for or against him or her in an

upcoming election. Perhaps more important is the obvious fact that legislation's potential effect on citizens depends entirely upon the maintenance of 60 votes and the clearance of each procedural hurdle. Thus exposure to the game frame, and especially its discussion of process, could compel citizens to better inform themselves of the issues and perhaps even get involved in the debate, and should therefore not be dismissed as invaluable.

This study's findings regarding the changes in frames' predominance over time, however, demonstrate that the ability to inform oneself of the issues would depend a great deal on when one was paying attention to it. One paying attention throughout the debate, for example, would have access to a healthy information environment during the summer and fall, whereas one who only chose to pay attention in August would perceive a debate defined by conflict. Tuning in during the last three months of the debate would lead to little information as well, although a focus on process during this time is understandable given the undeniable fact that procedure and vote-counts became increasingly important to report as the "finish line" grew closer.

In sum, then, the general lack of support for H2, coupled with the fact that framing over time was found to be consistent across the three newspapers, demonstrates that the media may follow few if any clear-cut framing patterns over the course of an entire policy debate. Based on the results of this study, issue-framing can clearly occur to a great extent, yet follows no consistently increasing or decreasing pattern. For example if conflict is rampant, as it was in August, issue-framing will likely take a hit, as it will when votes and vote-wrangling occur. Similarly, game-framing does not seem to steadily rise or fall, but, like conflict-framing, reflects reality. As such, it may tend to dominate

when certain procedural hurdles approach, and can likely be expected to spike when a “final” final outcome is looming.

Given the relative presence of frames and their predominance over time, then, it would be indefensible to suggest, as Kohut et al. justly charged in 1995, that the media “flunked the job” in their coverage of the 2009-2010 health care debate. Granted, no agreed-upon definition of the perfect proportion of frames in an article about public policy does or ever will exist. Yet focusing a near-equal number of paragraphs and overall articles on substantive information and game/process over the course of the 14-month debate seems as sufficient as one could reasonably hope.

The media cannot be expected to disregard the strategy, process, and conflict that inevitably surround public policy debates; to exclusively report on the reasons for, substance of, and consequences from potential legislation; or, perhaps most importantly, to offer some perfect proportional blend of paragraphs in each article on a daily or even month-to-month basis. Their job is to report reality, and such consistency does not exist in the policymaking process. However what the media, or at least the elite media, can be expected to do is to provide roughly equal parts substance and game or process over the course of an entire policy debate – and these three newspapers came very close to doing so. Though leaving much to be desired, they covered health care reform in 2009 and 2010 better than they themselves and many other media sources previously had.

Also of note, they utilized sources quite differently than the media had during the Clinton-era debate. For while President Obama was the most-utilized source in 2009, just as Jamieson and Cappella (1998) and Kohut et al. (1995) found President Clinton to be in 1993-1996, congressional sources as a whole dominated. In contrast to the Clinton-era



debate, when Jamieson and Cappella (1998) found Democrats and Republicans to make up less than one percent of total group mentions (in headlines), an average of six total congressional sources (of both chambers and parties) were utilized in each article.

Thirdly, interest groups were found to play a large role as sources during both time periods, yet the striking difference was that while Jamieson and Cappella (1998) found anti-reform groups to clearly dominate, the opposite seemed to be true in 2009-2010, although individual interest groups were not coded by their pro- or anti-reform positions.

And none of this should be surprising. For while the newspapers could exercise independence in sourcing to an extent, much of their decisionmaking was defined by the specific nature of the debate. President Obama made a clear and conscious decision to call on Congress to take the lead in debating and writing up potential legislation, whereas President Clinton made “Clinton” synonymous with health care reform by drawing up his own bill and putting first lady Clinton at the head of his health care task force. Thus while President Obama was far from absent, the fact that congressmen were sources an average of six times per article – and that, in accordance with previous research (Cook, 1988; 1998), total Senators and Democrats outnumbered total House members and Republicans by a roughly two to one ratio – is understandable.

So too is the change in the sourcing of interest groups. Whereas many groups, for example the Business Roundtable and the HIAA, advertised and spoke against President Clinton’s inflexible legislation at an increasing rate as the debate progressed and were subsequently used as sources to the exclusion of pro-reform groups, President Obama was able to enlist the support of most major groups regarding his general yet flexible goals by the summer of 2009. Thus while many interest groups maintained an important

role as sources in 2009, they were far less vocal and attention-grabbing than those of the past. Simply put, then, these three overarching findings seemed to reflect the newspapers' relatively accurate portrayal of reality.

While not investigated during the Clinton era, findings regarding the differences in sourcing across differently-framed articles also seemed to represent the debate's reality well. While no hypotheses were made, it seems intuitive that the grouping of government organizations, think tanks/NGOs, and experts appeared most often in issue/ecocon-framed articles. Specifically, an average of 3.64 of these fact-providers appeared in articles in which the issue/ecocon frame dominated, while they appeared an average of roughly once in game- or conflict-framed articles. Given that citizens were sources most during T2, the one time period when the conflict frame was prevalent, it also makes sense that, consistent with the research of Gans (1979) and Bennett (1990), they were far more likely to appear in conflict-framed articles than either of the other types.

Regarding congresspersons, it's no surprise that total Senators, House members, Democrats, and Republicans were more likely to appear in game-framed articles than issue/ecocon-framed articles given that reporters would seem likely to utilize them in discussions of votes, vote-wrangling, and the policymaking process. Breaking these sources down further, it's also logical that the media demonstrated a proclivity to include Senate and House Republicans, as the minority party that clearly took a "just say no" approach to reform, in conflict-framed articles.

That non-congressional Republicans were more likely to appear in conflict-framed articles than either other type, and that non-congressional Democrats were more likely to appear in game-framed articles than issue/ecocon-framed articles should not

surprise either. Sarah Palin, for instance, was likely the most prominent “other” Republican and made the news by spreading conflict with her infamous “death panel” remarks, whereas Bill Clinton, likely the most prominent “other” Democrat, was primarily involved in the debate through his attempts to advise Democrats on strategy and influence individual lawmakers. Lastly, while they were a rare source, one can explain the media’s increased likelihood to be cited in conflict-framed articles due to the conflict-based public opinion polls and questions to citizens that were attributed to them.

The pattern of these newspapers’ accurate depictions of reality also seemed to exist in their sourcing over time. Again, President Obama sought to put reform into the hands of Congress after introducing his general goals, and this was reflected by his steady decrease as a source until the final three months of the debate, when he regained prominence by utilizing the bully pulpit and campaign tactics to help reach his goal. Another collection of commonsensical findings was that Senators were most prominent during T4, when a final Senate vote on the bill was approaching; House members similarly became most prominent during T5, when their own vote neared; and during both periods each chamber’s Democrats, many of whom had not yet announced their votes and each of whom could spell the ultimate success or failure of reform, dominated. Aside from political voices, it also makes sense that interest groups were sources most at the beginning of the debate, when they likely sought coverage in order to offer their general pro- or anti-reform positions, and that the only time citizens played a significant role was during T2, the month of August and its conflict-laden town halls.

Finally, while all results regarding the use of frames were consistent across newspapers, the few differences that emerged in their use of sources make sense. If

hypothesizing, one would expect the East coast-based *NYT* and *WP* to utilize total Senators, House members, and various individual categories of congressmen of both parties more than the West coast-based *LAT* due to the simple variable of access. That none of the papers differed in sourcing Senators over House members and Democrats over Republicans, however, is also notable.

Indeed, the nearly across-the-board similarities in the three selected newspapers' overall framing and sourcing establishes these three newspapers as a largely homogenous group, and this was a key outcome of this study, which aimed to analyze the "elite" press. Taking the study's results as a whole, one can thus conclude that these specific newspapers offered readers a hefty amount of the substantive information upon which public knowledge and opinion can be built; a near-equal amount of arguably equally valuable information regarding congresspersons' voting intentions and the approach of a final outcome which, if resulting in passed legislation, would significantly alter their lives; and, while doing so unequally, gave voice to many diverse sources over the course of the debate. Furthermore, their inclusion of these frames and sources over time corresponded with the present context of the debate. Thus, by accurately reflecting reality, one can confidently assert that the *LAT*, the *NYT*, and the *WP* covered health care reform in 2009-2010 in a highly respectable manner.

### **Limitations**

One cannot, however, conclude that the media as a whole did the same. For while Pew's monthly analyses make clear that health care reform was heavily-covered by the mass media in 2009 and early 2010, and much research suggests that these newspapers often influence the coverage of other media, this study did not investigate whether they

did so regarding this specific issue. Indeed, when one considers Pew’s final report on news coverage of the health care debate – among other statistics, 75% of its 1,016 surveyed Americans said that over the course of the debate news organizations did only a “fair or a poor job” of explaining the details of the proposals, while 71% gave the media negative ratings for explaining how proposed legislation would affect them (Pew, 3/23/10) – one must consider that the *LAT*, *NYT*, and *WP* may not be regular components of the average Americans’ media diet.

In relation, while Jamieson and Cappella (1998) and Kohut et al. (1995) both included these three newspapers in their analysis, their samples respectively included ten and nine newspapers, along with nightly news broadcasts, and this study’s different findings may be attributable at least in part to this fact. More importantly, these scholars did not limit their sample to news stories only; the fact that they also included editorials, op-eds, and, in Jamieson and Cappella’s (1998) case, cartoons, may have significantly influenced their findings as well.

### **Directions for Further Research**

Clearly, the limited scope of the newspapers sampled in this study is its greatest limitation. At a time when Americans receive their news from diverse media and highly fragmented sources within these media, the results of content analyzing a mere three newspapers can not be generalized. The clearest direction for further research, then, would broaden this study’s sample to include more media sources, for example the nightly evening news, and more newspapers. Indeed, adding television to the sample would allow for a valuable inter-media comparison, and including a few regional and “non-elite” newspapers to the sample would offer insight into how newspapers as a

whole covered the debate. Given that many consider the *NYT* and *WP* to be at least somewhat liberal newspapers, the addition of a conservative “elite” newspaper, specifically the *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)*, would have very valuably allowed the researcher to investigate framing differences and the consistency of the two-to-one sourcing of the majority party over the minority party.

Beyond these obvious possibilities regarding the sample itself, the sampling period could have been extended to investigate framing and sourcing post-finish line, when it would be interesting to see if issue/ecocon-framed articles returned to the prominence that they lost during the last three months of the debate. Following Jamieson and Cappella (1998), this study could have also included an analysis of advertisements, which were far less frequent than in the 1993-1996 period but could be informative nonetheless. Also like this previous study, the current study could have included headlines in its framing analysis. If this were done, it would have been possible to analyze whether the dominant frame of the headline matched up with the dominant frame as measured by total paragraphs, and the results of this investigation would provide framing researchers with valuable information regarding the long-debated question of how to best analyze content in a way that most accurately measures salience and produces valid framing results.

Regarding sources, the study could have coded individual sources, for example Harry Reid or the American Association of Retired Persons, within its categories as Jamieson and Cappella (1998) did. Doing so would have led to further conclusions regarding the diversity or non-diversity of sources within each category, and would have been especially informative regarding the prominence of pro- or anti-reform groups. In

addition, it could have followed Kohut et al. (1995) in coding the valence of articles on a positive, negative, or neutral level, which would allow for an investigation of the relationship between tone and frames, sources, and time periods.

### **Implications**

All of this said, this study's specific aim was to assess how what are widely considered the best American newspapers covered the health care reform debate in 2009 and early 2010. In doing so, it demonstrated that an in-depth, albeit labor-intensive approach to measuring sources and frames can allow researchers to not only account for the diversity and relative presence of sources and frames that the news media offer within a given unit of content, but to also arrive at statistical conclusions that, as is rarely the case, are meaningful and comprehensible for the lay audience. In addition to this contribution to communication scholars, this study offers the public empirical proof that "the media" is not some homogenous being that acts as one. This analysis shows that the media can cover public policy debates in a way that provides a significant amount of substantive information – be it focused on the legislation itself or the many significant aspects of the policymaking process – to the audience. However whether media choose to do so, whether citizens choose to expose themselves to those media that do, and finally what citizens choose to do with the information provided, are and always will be some of the most fundamental questions of democracy.

## Appendix I – Coding Instructions

1. Coder: Simply write your first name.
2. Story Number: Record the story number written at the top of each printed article.
3. Date of Publication: mm/dd/yyyy.
4. Time Period of Publication:
  - “1” for T1 (2/24/2009 to 7/31/2009)
  - “2” for T2 (8/1/2009 to 9/1/2009)
  - “3” for T3 (9/2/2009 to 10/15/2009)
  - “4” for T4 (10/16/2009 to 12/24/2009)
  - “5” for T5 (12/25/2009 to 3/23/2010)
5. Newspaper: Record which of the three newspapers the story comes from:
  - “1” for the *Los Angeles Times*
  - “2” for the *New York Times*
  - “3” for the *Washington Post*
6. Total Number of Paragraphs: Simply count and record the total number of paragraphs in the story. (To be clear, a paragraph is any content separated from other content by a space, even if it consists of only one or a few sentences).
7. Total Number of Paragraphs per Source Type: Count and record the total paragraphs in which each of the source types below is directly quoted or has information attributed to it through words such as “says,” “believes,” “claims,” “criticizes,” etcetera.
  1. President, Vice President, administration officials/aides (e.g. Robert Gibbs, Rahm Emanuel), etc.
  2. Senate Democrat (or Democrats) or spokesperson/aide
  3. Senate Republican (or Republicans) or spokesperson/aide
  4. Senate Independent or spokesperson/aide
  5. House Democrat (or Democrats) or spokesperson/aide
  6. House Republican (or Republicans) or spokesperson/aide
  7. Unspecific congressional Democratic sources including “Democrats,” “Senate/House Democrats,” the “Democratic party”
  8. Unspecific congressional Republican sources including “Republicans,” “Senate/House Republicans,” the “Republican party”
  9. Non-congressional Democrats(s) (e.g. governor, Bill Clinton)
  10. Non-congressional Republican(s) (e.g. governor, Sara Palin)
  11. Interest group or source from it, also quoted material from advertisement
  12. Government organization/agency or source from it
  13. Think tank/NGO or think tank/NGO source
  14. Individual everyday citizen (one whose profession is not named) or everyday citizens as a group



15. Individual expert/professional citizen or “experts” as a group (also journal articles by “experts”)
16. Media (other newspaper, journalist, polls)
17. Other types of sources not listed above (e.g. “critics,” “supporters,” etc.)

Make sure to account for paragraphs in which different source types (e.g., the President and an interest group) appear. Also note that a single source (e.g., Nancy Pelosi) should be counted (e.g., under “House Democrat”) in each individual paragraph in which it (she) appears, while multiple sources of the same type (e.g., Nancy Pelosi and Barney Frank) in the same paragraph would count for two separate House Democrat sources. Remember that while “Obama said...” should be counted, an indirect past-tense reference such as “Obama *has* said...” should only be counted if the source is actually quoted. Lastly, count both unspecific groups (e.g. “Democrats” or “administration officials” and a specific number of sources (e.g. “45 Blue-dog Democrats” or “a group of six health insurance leaders”) as single sources. In these instances, only count multiple sources if they are individually named (e.g., 6 separate insurance leaders that make up the “group”).

#### **To make numbers 8-11 easier:**

**Now, according to the coding numbers, frame definitions, and examples below, code each separate paragraph as predominantly issue-, ecocon-, game-, or conflict-framed. While it will be likely that multiple frames may often seem to exist within individual paragraphs, consider the paragraph in the context of the article’s flow, and make a decision and assign a single frame to each paragraph. Specifically, if two frames seem equally present, code the paragraph under the frame that appears first. Finally, if it truly seems that none of these four frames is present, do not force yourself to read one of the above frames into it; instead, code the paragraph as “other.”**

#### “1” - Issue Frame:

The text focuses on public policy problems and solutions; the substance of legislation or proposed legislation or other government programs; politicians’ stands or statements on policy issues; and the general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public.

Put simply, the frame provides the readers with information about the basis for the bill (e.g., millions of uninsured Americans, denial of coverage due to preexisting conditions, inefficient and unwieldy patient records, etc.), what is in it or might be in it, or its non-economic implications (such as how many more people will be insured or how people with preexisting conditions can not be denied coverage).

Importantly, an issue-based question from a question-and-answer story, such as “Will all of the uninsured be covered under plans being developed in Congress?” (Levey, 8/16/2009), would be coded as an issue-framed paragraph.

Lastly, even if information about issues or the legislation is provided in sentences of another context (for example a game-framed context, which could state “To win bipartisan support, the bill includes...” or “The compromise includes...”), the paragraph should still be coded as issue-framed if substantive information is provided.

**Example Paragraphs:**

***“The bill leaves out a number of the key features of the Democrats' 1,990-page legislation, such as new requirements for employers to insure their employees and for nearly all Americans to purchase insurance. It also doesn't block insurers from denying coverage to people with pre-existing health conditions, as Democrats would do” (Werner, 11/3/2009).***

***“The public plan is not even a certainty. To win bipartisan support for the overhaul, some Democrats have proposed private nonprofit health care cooperatives, instead of a public plan, to compete with private insurers” (Pear & Herszenhorn, 8/10/2009).***

**“2” - Ecocon Frame:**

The text focuses on (a) the cost/degree of expense involved; (b) the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing an action; (c) the financial gains now or in the future; (d) the way(s) to pay for policy. In addition, it includes the explicitly economic issues that are cited as calling for legislation (e.g., ever-increasing premiums or families losing their homes in exchange for paying their medical bills) and the economic aspects of legislation/proposed legislation and/or their implications (e.g., subsidies to help the poor purchase health care and the projected savings from electronic records or Medicare cuts).

Further, a paragraph should be coded as ecocon-framed only if it explicitly talks about these economic aspects of health care policy. While this means that a paragraph that discusses, for example, the difficulties of passing health care in the context of Obama's other policies would be coded, one that discusses only the economic consequences of another policy would not.

**Example Paragraph:**

***“Majority Leader Harry Reid is considering a plan for higher payroll taxes on the upper-income earners to help finance health care legislation he intends to introduce in the Senate in the next several days, numerous Democratic officials said Wednesday.” (Espo, 11/11/2009).***

**“3” - Game Frame:** The text focuses on politicians winning or losing; politicians' (or interest groups') strategies for winning (e.g., legislative maneuvers or advertising campaigns); the implications of legislative outcomes for politicians, parties, and interest groups (especially in the context of electoral politics); specific legislative developments and vote “scores;” and the implications/predictions of developments for ultimate passage.

The frame also includes mentions of alliance- and coalition-building and maintaining; lawmakers' or interest group's negotiations, compromises, endorsements, and the significance of certain announcements or meetings; the specific “scores” of individual votes; individual lawmakers' votes and their significance; and what different “players” are doing and/or how they are influential in and important to the debate. It includes references to the dispersion of public opinion towards congressmen as well.

Words emphasizing the frame might include “win/loss,” “risk/reward,” “cost/benefit,” “politics,” “election,” “game,” “campaign,” “plan/game plan,”

“strategy,” “approach,” “lobbying,” “maneuver,” “reconciliation,” “sides,” “bipartisanship,” “compromise,” “negotiate/negotiators,” “give-and-take,” “tradeoff,” “consensus,” “ally,” “alliance,” “deal,” “60-vote,” “filibuster-pooof,” “competition,” “stand to gain,” “stand to lose,” “mobilization,” “influence,” “organization,” “role,” “political capital,” “rank and file,” “swing vote,” and “players.”

Finally, the game frame is also present if the text focuses on the legislative process, emphasized by words such as “step,” “hurdle,” “impasse,” “delay,” “gridlock,” “setback,” “breakdown,” “endgame,” “timetable,” “momentum,” etc.

**Example Paragraphs:**

*(Game) Others are still trying to figure out how to balance the desires of the base with the need to appeal to moderate swing voters who might be turned off by high-volume rhetoric. Whether they find that balance could determine whether the Republican Party can win back independents who voted overwhelmingly for Obama last year but now, according to several polls, are questioning their commitment to him (Hook & Wallsten, 8/16/2009).*

*(Strategy) Complicating matters now is that some activists have mounted their effort against a healthcare overhaul largely outside the party machinery. They are relying on social networking websites such as Twitter and Facebook to recruit volunteers for town hall meetings and spread YouTube videos of encounters with lawmakers (Hook & Wallsten, 8/16/2009).*

*(Process) After days of indecision, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (Ark.) -- the final Democratic holdout -- announced Saturday afternoon that she has decided to support a procedural motion to break a GOP filibuster. Reid now expects all 60 members of his caucus to vote yes at 8 p.m. Saturday, clearing the way for amendment deliberations to begin after the Thanksgiving recess (Murray, 11/21/2009).*

“We're running this campaign like this was a presidential campaign, and our candidate is health care reform," said Mr. Rivera, whose union is hugely resented by Republicans for doing so much to elect Mr. Obama” (Greenhouse, 8/27/2009).

“4” - Conflict Frame: The text focuses on (a) disagreement between parties or individuals or groups; (b) the rapprochement of one party/individual/group by another; (c) two sides or more than two sides of the problem/issue; or (d) the achievements and/or actions of an individual/party versus the achievements and/or achievements of another individual/party.

Beyond the differences of opinion of the two sides of the “game,” this frame more clearly emphasizes conflict through such key words as “fight,” “battle,” “clash,” “conflict,” “ire,” “army,” “contentious,” “derisive,” “shot back,” “criticize,” “blame,” “denounce,” “attack,” etc. A two-paragraph “supporters said” versus “critics said” would also point to this frame.

It also includes references to individuals’ (both legislators’, interest groups’, and citizens’) fears, worries, or distrust of legislation/certain aspects of legislation.

**Example Paragraph:**

*“Such a sharp clash of self-interests is evidence that President Obama may have been naive in suggesting early on that health care's stakeholders are now willing to set aside rivalries that have thwarted previous attempts at reform, said Uwe E. Reinhardt, a health economist at Princeton University who led a state commission on New Jersey's shaky hospital finances. "It's no different from Iraq with all the different tribes. . . . 'How does it affect the money flow to my interest group?' he said. 'They are all sitting in the woods with their machine guns, waiting to shoot.'” (Goldstein, 10/8/2009).*

“5” – None/Other Frame: The text does not clearly emphasize any of the above frames.

8. Total Number of Issue-Framed Paragraphs: Simply count up the total number of issue-framed paragraphs from the previous step and record the total.
9. Total Number of Ecocon-Framed Paragraphs: Simply count up the total number of ecocon-framed paragraphs from the **bold** step and record the total.
10. Total Number of Game-Framed Paragraphs: Simply count up the total number of ecocon-framed paragraphs from the **bold** step and record the total.
11. Total Number of Conflict-Framed Paragraphs: Simply count up the total conflict-framed paragraphs from the **bold** step and record the total.

## Appendix II – Coding Sheet

1. Coder \_\_\_\_\_
2. Story Number \_\_\_\_\_
3. Date of Publication \_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_
4. Time Period of Publication:
  - T1 (2/24/2009 to 7/31/2009) – 1
  - T2 (8/1/2009 to 9/1/2009) – 2
  - T3 (9/2/2009 to 10/15/2009) – 3
  - T4 (10/16/2009 to 12/24/2009) – 4
  - T5 (12/25/09 to 3/23/10) – 5
5. Newspaper:
  - LAT – 1
  - NYT – 2
  - WP – 3
6. Total Number of Paragraphs \_\_\_\_
7. Total Number of Paragraphs per Source Type:
  - President Obama et al. \_\_\_\_
  - Senate Democrat et al. \_\_\_\_
  - Senate Republican et al. \_\_\_\_
  - Senate Independent et al. \_\_\_\_
  - House Democrat et al. \_\_\_\_
  - House Republican et al. \_\_\_\_
  - Unspecific Democrat(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Unspecific Republican(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Non-congressional Democrat(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Non-congressional Republican(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Interest Group(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Government Organization/Agency \_\_\_\_
  - Think Tank/NGO \_\_\_\_
  - Non-Professional Citizen(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Expert/Professional Citizen(s) \_\_\_\_
  - Media \_\_\_\_
  - Other(s) \_\_\_\_
8. Total Number of Issue-Framed Paragraphs \_\_\_\_
9. Total Number of Ecocon-Framed Paragraphs \_\_\_\_
10. Total Number of Strategy/Game/Process-Framed Paragraphs \_\_\_\_
11. Total Number of Conflict-Framed Paragraphs \_\_\_\_

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