

BROAD STROKES, RICH DETAIL: A QUANTITATIVE OVERVIEW AND QUALITATIVE CASE STUDIES OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF TOBACCO POLICY, 2002-2003.

Catherine Siebel, Frank Chaloupka, Katherine Clegg Smith

Presentation Abstract

As one component of the SmokeLess States evaluation, the media tracking project was designed to assess how newspapers reported tobacco related stories. To that end, a random sample of articles (n = 40,221) was drawn from every daily, English-speaking newspaper in the United States. These articles were coded for prominence, type, content, and tone, creating an enormous database of coverage for analysis.

This presentation has two primary goals. First, it will explore statistically significant patterns of news coverage, focusing on favorable and unfavorable coverage toward SLS policies. Second, it will attempt to bridge the gap between the typical quantitative presentation and the rich qualitative detail that is available but often overlooked.

Three case studies will be presented: coverage of the 2003 ban on smoking in all bars and restaurants in New York City; news treatment of cigarette taxes in six states; and variations in Associated Press stories across four key policy areas. These case studies were designed to complement the goals of the SLS evaluation by offering qualitative detail to the broad strokes provided by statistical analyses.

This presentation will encourage audience members to consider the role of the news media in evaluating nationwide programs, and to evaluate the methodological and theoretical relationship between the statistical power of quantitative analyses and the detail offered by qualitative case studies of specific topics.

EXAMPLES OF ADDITIONAL ANALYSES (CURRENTLY IN PUBLICATION PROCESS)

Press Coverage of State Cigarette Tax Initiatives: Oppositional arguments in the news media

Katherine Clegg Smith, Elizabeth Edsall Kromm, Catherine Siebel, Frank Chaloupka, Melanie Wakefield

Abstract

Increasing cigarette taxes is key for effective tobacco control and also an effective means of generating public revenue. Recently, there has been considerable U.S. state-level tax policy activity; between 1/1/2002 and 9/1/2005, 41 states and the District of Columbia passed 57 separate tax increases. In one year (2002), 28 states attempted increases, and 22 were successful.

The news media influence both which issues gain public and policy attention, and how such issues are understood. This case study of print news coverage from six states in 2002 (N= 314 news articles) examines oppositional arguments presented in media discussions of taxation initiatives. Qualitative content analysis revealed that oppositional arguments were included in nearly all news reports, regardless of any overt support or opposition to the tax increase. Maximizing opportunities for policy success requires that policy advocates tackle strong rhetorical opposition to taxation—namely the framing of taxation as victimization and taxation as inappropriate government interference.

Is it really a good idea to remove duplicates? Variation in Associated Press coverage of tobacco policies

Catherine Siebel

Abstract

To the extent that research on the press considers syndicated wire stories at all, the literature consistently (although tacitly) assumes newspapers publish these articles uniformly and unaltered. This project challenges that assumption by examining qualitative differences in wire stories across U.S. newspapers. Using wire coverage of tobacco control policy as a case study, I explore variation in Associated Press articles. Findings suggest that newspapers mold AP stories in ways that substantively change the nature of coverage. Article placement and prominence, headlines, and source inclusion can vary dramatically among versions of a single wire release. This analysis lacks the scope to explore structural explanations, but provides support for future research.
