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Medical cannabis: A Framing Analysis of Israeli Newspaper Coverage

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Online & print news readership > **95%**
Israeli adults

Important source of **health information** (complex topics such as medical cannabis)



Media coverage influences public perceptions of, and **attitudes** toward medical cannabis (and policy).



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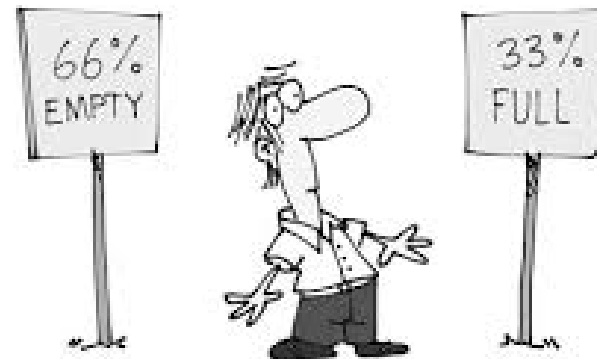


Media effects: **Framing theory**

News coverage of medical cannabis (or other topics) influences public policy by shaping public opinion.

How? By promoting particular perspectives rather than others.

Framing: A dynamic interaction between journalists, stakeholders (elite groups) and social movements.



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Elite groups exercise **control over resources** and the allocation of authority, assets and control of institutions.



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Few studies on media coverage of medical cannabis.

Kaiser, 2011 – **U.S. print media coverage**

Q: *Was the topic framed as a medical or policy issue?*

A: Medical cannabis was framed primarily as a policy issue.

We investigate **3 competing frames** for medical cannabis in Israeli media coverage (2007-2013).

Frames represent powerful elite groups directly involved in the issue: (1) **Medical/research community**; (2) **Regulators and politicians**, and (3) **Law enforcement**.

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Method - Content analysis

1. **Overall frame** (i.e. primary focus/context of the item)
2. **Sources cited directly** (in direct quotes)
3. **Most prominent source** (cited first/most frequently)
4. **Reference to cannabis** (i.e. treatment / drug / economic business)
5. **Portrayal of patients** (i.e. needy or in distress / neutral / untrustworthy)

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Hypotheses: Elements in the news items will be associated with the overall frame for medical cannabis (i.e. as a medical /policy / law enforcement issue).

Sources

The **source cited directly (H1)** and **most prominent source (H2)** will be associated with the overall frame for CTP (e.g. in articles with a medical frame, medical professionals will be cited directly/most prominent, compared with other sources).

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Framing of Cannabis:

H3. References to medical cannabis will be associated with the overall frame (e.g. news items with a law enforcement frame will refer to MC as a drug > as a medicine).

Portrayal of Patients:

H4. Patients will be portrayed as **victims of disease** in news items with a **medical frame**, in **neutral terms** in items with a **policy frame**, and referred to in **negative terms** in items with a **law enforcement frame**.

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Over-time trends in proportion and stability of frames:

H5: We expected that the policy frame would be the most prevalent (Kaiser, 2011).

RQ: *How stable are each of these frames over time?*

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Sample: All news stories focused on medical cannabis that were published in the three highest circulation national newspapers (print and on-line) in Israel (Yediot, Maariv and Haaretz) from January 2007 through June 2013.

Search terms: ‘cannabis’; ‘medical cannabis’; ‘marijuana’; ‘medical marijuana’. **Final sample = 208 articles**

Coding: 2 trained graduate student coders.

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Reliability: Coders independently coded a random sample (12% of sample). Krippendorff's Alpha $>.80$ (0.83 to 1.0).

Analysis: Unit of analysis = individual newspaper item.

Methods: Chi square tests of independence (H1-H4).

H5 and time trends: step-wise logistic regression (frame = dependent variable), with standardized squared and cubed time trend variables (Marquardt, 1980).

Results: H1 (source cited directly)

	Medical Frame (n=50)	Policy Frame (n=120)	Law enforcement frame (n=38)	n
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	N=208
Medical/ health professionals	23_a (52.3%)	16 _b (16.8%)	5 _b (16.7%)	44
Regulators / Politicians	2 _a (4.5%)	39_b (41.1%)	0 _a (0.0%)	41
Law enforcement	1 _a (2.3%)	6 _a (6.3%)	8_b (26.7%)	15
Patients or growers	17 _a (38.6%)	27 _a (28.4%)	14_a (46.7%)	58
Other	1 _a (2.3%)	7 _a (7.4%)	3 _a (10.0%)	11

The sources cited differed by frame, $\chi^2 (8) = 59.07, p < .001$.

Results: H2 (most prominent source)

	Medical Frame (n=50)	Policy Frame (n=120)	Law enforcement frame (n=38)	n
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	N=208
Medical/ health professionals	11 _a (22.0%)	12 _a (10.0%)	6 _a (15.8%)	29
Regulators / Politicians	7 _a (14.0%)	65 _b (54.2%)	0 _c (0.0%)	72
Law enforcement	0 _a (0.0%)	6 _a (5.0%)	9 _b (23.7%)	15
Patients or growers	29 _a (58.0%)	28 _b (23.3%)	22 _a (57.9%)	79
Other	3 _a (6.0%)	9 _a (7.5%)	1 _a (2.6%)	12

The most prominent source differed by frame, $\chi^2 (8) = 72.14, p < .001$.

Results: H3 (reference to cannabis)

	Medical Frame (n=50)	Policy Frame (n=120)	Law enforcement frame (n=38)	n
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	N=208
Cannabis is a drug	3 _a (6.1%)	31 _b (25.8%)	31 _c (81.6%)	65
Cannabis is medicine	46 _a (93.9%)	80 _b (66.7%)	7 _c (18.4%)	133
Cannabis as other (e.g. business)	0 _a (0.0%)	9 _a (7.5%)	0 _a (0.0%)	9

References to cannabis differed by frame, $\chi^2(4) = 67.31, p < .001$.

Results: H4 (portrayal of patients)

	Medical Frame (n=50)	Policy Frame (n=120)	Law enforcement frame (n=38)	n
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	N=208
In distress/needy	31_a (62.0%)	38 _b (31.9%)	9 _b (23.7%)	78
Untrustworthy	3 _a (6.0%)	12 _a (10.1%)	19_b (50.0%)	34
Neutral	14 _{ab} (28.0%)	56_b (47.1%)	4 _a (10.5%)	74
No mention of patients	2 _a (4.0%)	13 _a (10.9%)	6 _b (15.8%)	21

Portrayal of patients differed by frame, $\chi^2(6) = 58.15, p < .001$.

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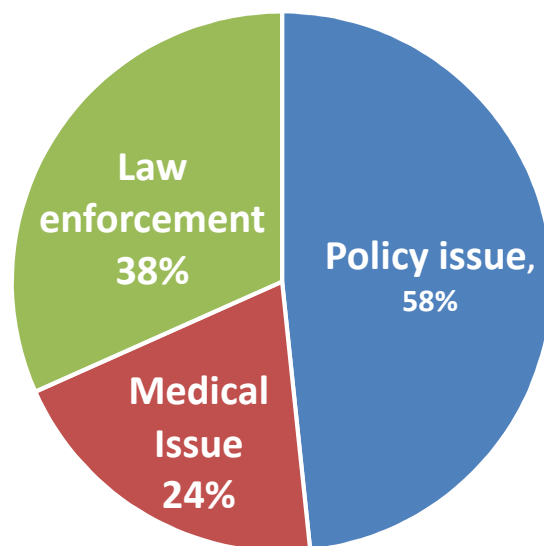
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H5 supported: Proportional tests showed that policy frame was more prevalent than other frames ($p < .001$)

Framing (proportion of total)



■ Policy issue

■ Medical Issue

■ Law enforcement

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Results: Time trend analysis: **Policy frame is more prevalent and stable** over time (compared to other frames)

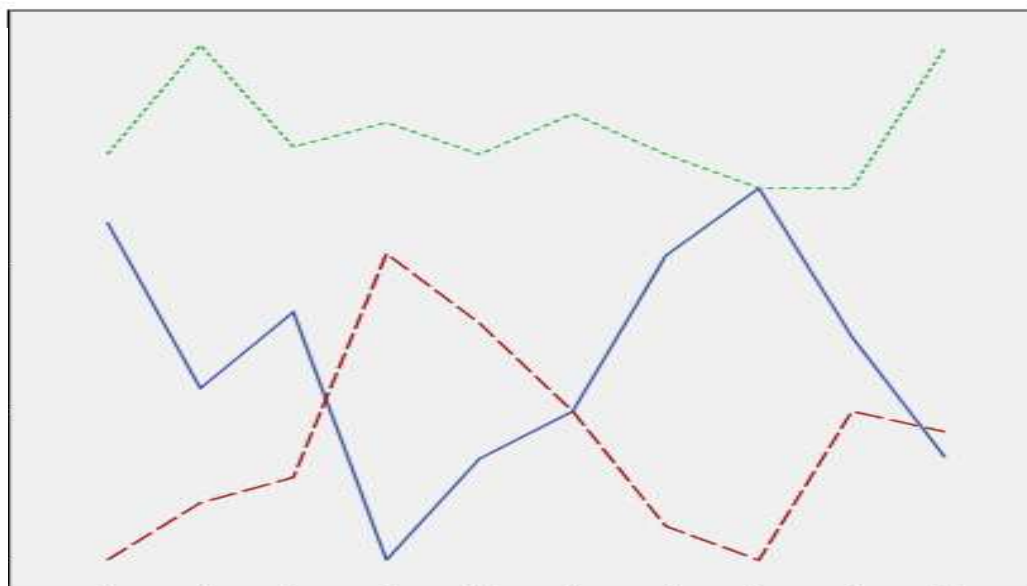
Jan/2007

June 2013

Green: Policy

Blue: Medical

Red: Law
Enforcement



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- First study to examine the framing of Israeli news coverage of medical cannabis.
- The three competing frames for medical cannabis were associated with contextual elements within news items.
- Media framing may shape public opinion about medical cannabis which, in turn is likely to influence medical cannabis policy (e.g. greater focus on policy concerns rather than medical potential).

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Dominant policy frame promotes a relatively neutral view of medical cannabis and of patients.

Policy makers may have a structural advantage (i.e. greater access to journalists) and a vested interest in promoting a policy frame

Stability of frames: Policy frame investigates long-term issues vs. short lived events (medical breakthrough or criminal cases) = **less controversial but more stable.**

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Unexpected finding – Patient testimonials were prevalent, and framed positively.

Research on testimonials shows effects on attitude change – led to second study (Dr. Sharon Sznitman)



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Small sample size (limited focus on health relative to other issues in Israel).

- But, volume is not an indicator of importance (impacts tens of thousands of patients).

Study doesn't explore reader's interpretations of competing frames and effects of framing on policy.

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Thank you!

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