JOKERS, SMOKERS AND MIDNIGHT TOKERS?:
HOW TELEVISION NEWS FRAMED “PRO-POT” LEGISLATION IN OREGON
AND COLORADO BEFORE THE NOVEMBER 6, 2012 ELECTIONS

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Missouri — Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

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MAY 2014
The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined

the thesis entitled

HOW TELEVISION NEWS FRAMED “PRO-POT” LEGISLATION IN
OREGON COLORADO BEFORE THE NOVEMBER 6, 2012 ELECTIONS

Presented by Chris Long,

A candidate for the degree of master of journalism,

And hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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I would first like to thank Tim P. Vos, my thesis committee chair. I would not have been able to complete this research without his demanding feedback delivered in such a calming way, it actually persuaded me I was capable of writing this document. I would also like to thank the additional members of my thesis committee: Margaret Duffy, Ben Warner and Daryl Moen. Their insights and high expectations helped me formulate the optimal method for analysis. Beyond my committee, thanks are due to the staff of the Frank Lee Martin Memorial Journalism Library. They assisted me find the necessary resources and were generous about some too. I would also like to acknowledge PD Kasate.

Additional thanks belong to my parents, Ted and Kathy Long. Without the support of my family I would not have done this.
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In Oregon a ballot measure to legalize marijuana failed on November 6, 2012. In Colorado marijuana was legalized for recreational use that same day. In the political hockey game of marijuana legalization journalists serve as something of a referee. Just as different referees can interpret the rulebook different ways, different news outlets often frame a public policy issue different ways. This study was a frame analysis of 75 television news stories from nine stations in Colorado, eleven stations in Oregon in addition to the Cable News Network (CNN). The frames used included: regulations on marijuana similar to ones on alcohol, controversial legislation, community impact, economic issue, electoral prospects, public health and safety issue, libertarian, outsider’s perspective, horserace coverage. Journalists’ use of these frames helped construct relative legitimacy around the debate over Amendment 64 and Measure-80.

Frames are necessary to tell stories effectively and help viewers give meaning to an event or a series of events. To tell a story without a frame suggests the possibility of a single universal truth about a series of events and description of a place, which any idealist would immediately dismiss. How journalists construct frames will shape how media users construct the world they co-create.
(Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). For that reason, it is valuable to study the frames used in television news stories about marijuana in Oregon and Colorado. This study found television stations in Colorado framed the debate over “pro-pot” legislation through following frames: controversial legislation, regulations on marijuana similar to the ones on alcohol, economic. Oregon stations used horse race or electoral prospects, impact on Oregon’s health and safety, and economic frames. CNN used economic, outsider's perspective, libertarian and horserace frame.
The purpose of this textual analysis study is to examine the television news coverage of Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Ballot Initiative 80 in their respective states and on CNN, which represents the majority of Americans’ reported main source of news (Gallup, 2013). Specifically this study engages the following research questions:

How did local television news outlets in Colorado and Oregon frame marijuana use in the six-week time period preceding the legalization of marijuana in Colorado and the failed Cannabis Tax Act in Oregon (Oct. 6, 2012-Nov. 6, 2012)?

How did CNN frame the issue of legalized marijuana use in the same time period?

How do these frames help construct the relative legitimacy of the policy debate on the legalization of marijuana for recreational use?

To give a brief overview of its history, marijuana has been grown in America as cash crop since 1619 when King James of England ordered his colony to grow 100 crops for export (Deitch, 2003). Sale of marijuana was most notably restricted by The Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, which prohibited possession and transportation federally (Jones, 2004). Around the same time, William Randolph Hearst’s newspapers published articles that framed marijuana users as violent criminals. The newspapers were thought to be so influential on public opinion, he
was commended for pioneering the national fight against marijuana at a narcotics conference in 1937 (Bonnie & Whitebread, 1974).

In 1969 about 16 percent of American voters supported marijuana legalization (Gallup, 2011). In 1973, Oregon was the first state to decriminalize cannabis and within five years eight others did the same (McVeigh, 2004). By 2012, twenty states allowed marijuana for medicinal use. Additionally, about 64 percent of Americans believed the federal government should not intervene in Colorado and Washington where marijuana was legalized for recreational purposes (Gallup, 2011).

These changes in public policy provide a practical application of Hallin’s (1986) spheres of influence. Hallin suggested media coverage of a particular event or issue fall into three “spheres”—consensus, legitimate controversy and deviance—and journalists adhere to different rules of objectivity when they cover events in different spheres. Over time, the same issue often moves from sphere to sphere. The history of the laws that regulate or prohibit the sale and consumption of marijuana suggest the issue of marijuana legalization has moved through various places on Hallin’s (1986) spheres of influence. These laws, it seems, have gone from the innermost circle, the sphere of consensus, into the next concentric circle, the sphere of legitimate controversy and then into the sphere of deviance in the early 1970s. The issue moved back into the sphere of legitimate controversy when states such as Colorado and Oregon voted on legalized marijuana. The research in this study analyzes the way television news journalists at CNN and at local Colorado and Oregon stations framed recreational marijuana during the month before the November 6, 2012 election.
Previous research on framing theory (Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993) indicates how journalists frame an issue influences how their audience members’ opinions are influenced. It is important then, to understand journalists’ influence on voters who in turn determine the outcome of elections. While the scope of this research is limited to the time period directly before the November 6, 2012 elections, the results could be relevant to future research done on framing theory and on a larger scale understand the reality journalists and voters have co-created. An understanding of the answer to these research questions will help foster understanding the relationship between frames used in television newscasts and a public policy that will likely appear in many news stories in many different platforms in the United States for years to come.
CHAPTER TWO
Theoretical Frameworks

Frames and Framing

In seeking to examine the coverage of the two so-called “pro-pot” pieces of legislature, this study uses the concept of the frame as the primary unit of analysis. Framing theory challenges the realist interpretation that a single universal take on the day’s events exists. It also goes against and the understanding that journalists can hold a mirror to society (Mindich, 1998). Instead, framing theory suggests media frames influence how audiences think about public policy issues (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Audience members’ opinions change as the frames used to tell a news story change. It appears news reporters could influence the way many voters make sense of their reality (whether or not it was their intent) by influencing which parts of a news story receive salience (Callahan & Schnell, 2001). Frames express the power individuals who practice journalism have to influence public policy in the community where viewers see the frames (Watkins, 2001).

While political actors would like to influence journalists into framing issues in accordance with their interests, Lawrence (2010) found this more difficult to do on domestic issues than on foreign ones. Frames on foreign policy issues are much more closely tied to official policy than domestically. Callaghan and Schnell’s (2001) research on news framing of domestic gun control found journalists relied on a “culture of violence” frame more than their sources did, suggesting independence from their gun advocate sources.
Print and broadcast journalists use frames as an organizational tool. Although journalists rarely construct frames with intentional ideological bias or for politically motivated reasons, they do organize information as a result of their interaction with sources that promote their perspectives (Carpenter 2007). Their frames can be influenced by elite sources’ messages. This is especially accurate at news organizations that rely on official and elite news sources more than their own independent reports (Reese, 2001, p. 12). Carpenter (2007) writes elite news sources act as agenda setters for non-elite publications; non-elite organizations are less likely to emulate elite news organizations on topics they have the resources to cover (pp.761-762). It is important to make clear that frames are not synonymous with biases; rather frames act as a storytelling device. To tell a story without a frame suggests the existence of a single objective truth.

Link to Critical Theory

Hallahan (1999) suggests framing theory shapes the cognitive processing of information by individual viewers. Furthermore it defines the meaning of the speaker’s messages by shaping the inferences individuals make about the message. This involves “selecting key themes or ideas that are the focus of the message and incorporating a variety of storytelling or narrative techniques that support that theme” (p.207). Journalists must be mindful of the frames they use when telling a news story. When framing who is responsible for a news event, individual audience members usually assign blame about the cause of events to either internal or external factors, based on the level of stability and control (Iyengar, 1991). People attribute causes to personal actions rather than systemic
problems in society (Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, & Themba, 1993). Media reports use themes that are familiar to the audience in order to relay information about an event (Gamson, 1984, p.12) and sources vie for preferred framing through frame enterprise and frame sponsorship.

Put simply, frames assign meaning to an event. The storyteller, whether a man at the bar simply explaining baseball or Walter Cronkite questioning the Vietnam War, selects one interpretation of the event as more salient than another. In turn, frames shape the judgments and decisions the audience makes about often complicated political issues (Nisbet, 2010). Reese (2010) calls frames “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time” (p.18). To paraphrase Romano (2010), what journalists present to the reader isn’t a mirror image of reality. It is a narrative that serves a specific purpose.

Iyengar (1987) wrote that the concept of framing refers to subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems. He also defines framing effects as the changes in decision outcomes as a result of what is most salient or predominant in a news story. Others define frames slightly differently. In their critique of Goffman’s earlier work, Denzin and Keller (1981) define frames as “definitions of a situation (that) are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame(s)...refer to such of these basic elements” (Denzin & Keller, 1981, p. 53). Brewer and Gross (2010) also quote Gamson’s definition of what constitutes a frame in their study on the effects of framing on public opinion. Gamson (1987) defined a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of
events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the
controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p.161). Frames shape beliefs about
the essence of the issue at hand and how an issue is framed correlates to how it is
perceived by the public (Hallahan, 1999). Scheufele (1999) defines the difference
between the two main ways of framing an issue, framing a news story
thematically—on an abstract level in the form of general outcomes—and
episodically—depicting public issues in the form of concrete instances or specific
events.

Entman (1993) outlines the four elements of frames:

Define problems—determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs
and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values;

diagnose causes—identify the forces creating the problem;

make moral judgments—evaluate causal agents and their effects;

suggest remedies—offer and justify treatments for the problems and
predict their likely effects.

A single sentence in a news story might perform all of these functions at
the same time (p. 52).
No studies of media coverage of Colorado Amendment 64 or Oregon Measure 80 have been located. Only a meager body of framing research on marijuana exists. Part of the reason for this meager body of research on marijuana in the media is likely a result of the shifting attitude and perception throughout the course of American history. On an abstract level, from the early days of marijuana prohibition until recently, legalized marijuana, as a political issue, has been located in Hallin’s (1980) sphere of deviance. However there are plenty of examples of media framing analyses on topics other than so-called pro-marijuana legislation in Oregon and Colorado. These framing analyses combined with the theoretical background provided by Hallin (1980) serve as the starting point for this research.

**Hallin’s Three Spheres of Influence**

Hallin (1986) writes some issues don’t receive significant coverage, if they receive any at all. They aren’t seen as relatively legitimate (in part) because the frames journalists use when discussing them. Hallin explained this principle, which is central to this research, in his book, *The Uncensored War*. Hallin defines three regions that are governed by different journalistic standards. It is helpful to picture them as a target on a dartboard. In the double bull’s-eye, the innermost target, lies Hallin’s sphere of consensus. “It encompasses those social objects not regarded by the journalists and most of the society as controversial” (Hallin, 1986, p. 116). Rather than present opposing viewpoints as a detached
observer, journalists act as advocates of consensus values. In the concentric circle directly outside the sphere of consensus lies the sphere of legitimate controversy. Here “objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic virtues” (Hallin, 1986, p. 116). It is the region in which journalists cover electoral contests and legislative debates that have been deemed important by political elites. Beyond that circle lies the sphere of deviance. Hallin (1986) defines it as “the realm of those political actors and views which journalists reject as unworthy of being heard” (p.116). Hallin (1980) cites the Federal Communication Commission guidelines that don’t allow for communists viewpoints to air. When an issue lies outside of the spheres of consensus and/or legitimate controversy the message is not as believable to viewers as messages that lie within them. Messages in the sphere of deviance are framed as non-credible or irrelevant.

It would seem logical based on Hallin’s conceptualization that issues can move—and often do move—through the spheres as public opinion begins to shift. The merits of marijuana legalization are no exception. These lines are not well defined, and it is sometimes difficult to determine where an issues lies within the spheres. The debate over the legalization of marijuana for recreational use would most likely have been in the sphere of deviance during the height of President Nixon’s “War on Drugs” and earlier during the initial prohibition on marijuana during the 1940s. It is valuable to know how journalists have framed an issue, such as marijuana use in these two states, because of the relationship with current public policy and potential changes to it. In order to effectively examine how marijuana legalization was framed before the elections in Oregon and Colorado, it is important to review previous framing research.
Previous framing analysis research

Golan (2010) analyzed the frames used in 226 op-ed and editorial columns written in California about medicinal marijuana (California Proposition 215) between November 11, 2006 and November 11, 2008. The analysis was done quantitatively and the five-point scale ranged from strong opposition to strong support. As is common, many stories presented multiple issue frames. In those instances the story was coded for the main issue frame. Examples of frames included: (1) moral, (2) medical, (3) legal, (4) political and (5) social.

Interestingly, there were few discussions of medical marijuana that used a moral frame. Almost half of all stories framed medical marijuana from a medical benefits perspective. This lack of diversity of frames suggests editors designated which issues of the medicinal marijuana their staff covered and which ones op-ed contributors would discuss (Golan, 2010). These results indicate opinion editors tend to provide limited perspectives in the framing of important public issues (Greenberg, 2000).

Another study (Stryker, 2010) examined how coverage of marijuana affected adolescents’ opinions toward marijuana. That same study also tracked adolescents’ marijuana consumption habits. Personal disapproval was found to partially mediate the relationship between media coverage and marijuana abstinence. It also found that news media messages appear to influence adolescents’ marijuana consumption habits. The author suggested public health practitioners forge relationships with news directors to influence the content of health behavior coverage, presumably to limit the number of individuals who smoke marijuana (Stryker, 2010).
Although it does not relate to marijuana directly, it is noteworthy to consider Reber and Berger’s (2005) framing analysis of the Sierra Club’s collective action and issue frames because it provides an example of a well-done framing analysis. The study examined the ‘master’ and ‘supporting sub’ frames on three environmental issues in 79 chapter newsletter articles and 102 national newspaper articles. Four of the so-called master frames were (1) drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge threatens one of America’s greatest natural wilderness treasures; (2) it won’t solve energy problems; (3) it threatens our traditional ways of life and wilderness values; and (4) a need for comprehensive energy policy overhaul. This framing analysis found a diversity of frames; no single frames appeared in more than 5.8% of articles on drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This diversity of frames may weaken the power a single frame has to shape media coverage or influence public opinion. Reber and Berger (2005) also speculate a point of diminishing returns for frames exists and feel it is important for future public relations practitioners to consider when to reduce or expand the number of frames.

In another framing analysis that is outside the scope of marijuana but still noteworthy because of the example it provides framing researchers, Martin (2004) writes that journalists typically promote a consumer sphere, in which the consumer is central and public actions are defined in terms of appropriate consumer behavior. He analyzed the five most prominent labor stories of the 1990s and determined the five frames that dominated coverage: (1) consumer is king, (2) the public doesn’t have a right to know the process of production; (3) important business leaders and entrepreneurs drive the economy; (4) the
workplace rewards individuals based on their merit; and, (5) collective economic action disrupts the economy. As a result of this consumer-centric framing, journalists covering labor unions and/or strikes typically criticize and blame the workers and support their management.

Framing theory explains how the textual elements in a newspaper article or television news story can privilege certain interpretations of the situation at hand. This critical theory perspective contends the media’s reliance on elite or powerful frames create reports that help the powerful maintain their position. The literature on media coverage on marijuana is grounded in this critical perspective. However, an issue such as marijuana can shift through Hallin’s (1980) three spheres. As recreational marijuana use shifts closer and closer to the sphere of consensus, where journalists do not feel required to present opposing view points, it is important to consider the framing devices journalists use. This critical perspective provides a rationale for examining the relationship between television journalists and recreational marijuana debates. Given this, the research questions that will guide this research are:

RQ1: How did local television news outlets in Colorado and Oregon frame marijuana use in the three months preceding the legalization of marijuana in Colorado and the failed Cannabis Tax Act in Oregon (approximately Oct. 6, 2012-Nov. 6, 2012)

RQ2: How did CNN frame the issue of marijuana use in the same time period?

RQ3: How do these frames help construct the relative legitimacy of the policy debate on the legalization of marijuana for recreational use.
CHAPTER FOUR
Research Design and Methodology

This study analyzed 75 stories of varying lengths from 21 different television stations (nine in Colorado, eleven in Oregon and CNN). In order to carry out this study it was necessary to identify repeated patterns or themes in coverage. This required going through the individual texts to look for re-occurring phrases and stylistic clues. The coding process was done, that is to say the frames were identified, after examining the texts.

To analyze frames most effectively, the researcher must inductively look to see which elements of the news story are given more salience or featured more prominently than others. Additionally, the researcher must also identify the frames and determine if the issue is raised as a legitimate issue or if it is dismissed through certain negative valence framing effects. The researcher must also look for the metaphors used, the textual depiction of either marijuana smokers or the issue and the setting the news story takes place in. A clear understanding of what to look for when determining frames will maximize the credibility and transferability of the results. For this study, qualitative research methods allow for a more robust description of the frames journalists used when reporting on Colorado Amendment 64 or Oregon Measure 80 (Altheide & Schneider, 2012).

The initial search on the website 360 Media Watch yielded over 300 stories about Amendment 64 and Measure 80 on stations in Colorado and Oregon respectively. It can often be difficult for researchers to determine how
many texts will sufficiently answer their questions (Altheide & Schneider, 2012). However, if one considers the principle of diminishing returns, the much more manageable sample size that was selected becomes justified.

This study seeks to examine television coverage of Colorado Amendment 64 on the following television stations: KUSA-NBC Denver, KWGN-CW Denver, KCNC-CBS Denver, KDVR-FOX Denver, KMGH-ABC Denver, KRDO Colorado Springs-Pueblo, KXRM Colorado Springs-Pueblo, KREX-CBS Grand Junction-Montrose, KJCT-ABC Grand Junction-Montrose. This study also seeks to examine television coverage of Oregon Measure 80 on the following stations: KATU-ABC Portland, KPTV-FOX Portland, KPDX-MNT Portland, KOIN-CBS Portland, KTVL-CBS Medford-Klamath Falls, KTVZ-NBC Bend, KMVU-FOX Medford-Klamath Falls, KOBI-NBC Medford-Klamath Falls, KRCW-CW Portland, KOIN- CBS Portland. Additionally, this study seeks to examine the coverage both Oregon Measure 80 and its counterpart, Colorado Amendment 64 received on CNN. It examines the coverage of these two “pro-pot” pieces of legislation received on a diverse number of stations in an effort to determine:

- Did television stations in Colorado, where legislation legalizing the recreational sale and consumption of marijuana passed about 55%-45%, frame the legislation differently compared to television stations in Oregon, where similar legislation was defeated about 53%-47%?
• How did CNN’s coverage of these two pieces of legislation differ from coverage at the state level? Specifically, was it more aligned with the federal government’s position on marijuana?

When the decision to select which stations were included in the analysis, it was important to not exclude any of the television stations the search on 360 Media Watch returned. These stations are non-niche sources of news that most people in their respective states have access to. CNN was selected because it serves as a source of news 24 hours a day and isn’t partisan the way Fox or MSNBC are (Greenwald, 2004). It was more valuable to analyze television than other sources of news because television was where most people said they got their news from in 2012 (Gallup, 2012). Seven percent of respondents to a Gallup poll said CNN was their primary source of news; four percent said local stations (Gallup, 2012). These numbers are far from perfect because of the open-ended nature of the poll. Twenty-six percent said non-specific television news (Gallup, 2012). While Fox News did get the highest reported percentage of viewers on a national level, it is set up as more of a proponent of a conservative point of view than a detached observer and an exception to the rule that frames are usually created without political motivation (Greenwald, 2004). However, CNN is not without its share of detractors. Anderson (2004) feels fair journalism is secondary to profitability at CNN.

The drive for increasing earnings on a yearly basis has a direct impact on what news is covered and how it is covered at a network like CNN. Everything, including programming and staffing, is affected. This consideration has meant cheating American viewers of news they should
have had immediately at times when the network could make more money renting its facilities and services to others (p.167).

Anderson (2004) reports this breach of ethics was not an isolated incident nor was it atypical of CNN policy. She quotes CNN’s Baghdad executive producer during the Gulf War, Robert Weiner “Now I’m told [by people around the world] that CNN is looked at as nothing more than a mouthpiece of the U.S. administration” (p. 164).

Be that as it may, the political science theory known as the CNN effect (Robinson, 2002) also justifies analyzing texts from CNN instead of Fox. The theory suggests CNN has significantly impacted public policy since its inception. CNN, more than any other network, has the ability to influence what the public believes are important public policy issues and to drive policy decision-makers to have a stance on a particular issue (Livingston, 1997). It seems that CNN is the most influential of the national news networks and for that reason the optimal source to analyze.

In order to do so with any sort of accuracy one must first aggregate the necessary texts. The website 360 Media provides a more comprehensive list of texts than similar websites, including Vanderbilt News Archive and TV Eyes. The news archive 360 Media allows the researcher to gain access to the transcripts of television broadcasts further back than 90 days, unlike TV Eyes. Unlike Vanderbilt News Archive, the researcher is allowed immediate access to the transcripts and does not have to wait for a DVD copy of the broadcast to arrive in the mail, transcribe the texts and then send the DVD back. Although television is
obviously a visual medium, the transcripts of the broadcast have more utility to this study. The visual elements of the news story serve as additional information for the audience members (Coleman and Banning 2006) while the transcripts of the broadcast serve as primary framing agents.

On November 6, 2012 Colorado voters passed Amendment 64 with 55.32% support. That same day, a ballot measure in Oregon that would have allowed personal marijuana use without a license and regulated the sale of commercial marijuana was defeated with 53.44% opposition and 46.56% support (see Appendix A for the text of the two ballot measures). Rather than analyze a specific common time period before the election, his study analyzes the last 23 stories about Oregon Measure 80 and 25 stories that were broadcast locally before the election. In addition the study analyzes the last 16 stories broadcast on CNN about “pro-pot” legislation. In the cases stories about Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80 on local television the study analyzed texts from October 9 through November 6, 2014 and October 10 through November 6, 2012, respectively. The study analyzed the texts from CNN during the time period beginning on September 8th and ending on Election Day. The researcher consciously made a decision to not analyze a random sampling of texts beginning when the ballot measure was initially introduced. This was done in order to analyze the television news stories that were most likely to be seen by viewers and be the ones viewers remembered.

It should not be inferred that a quantitative analysis of the frames journalists used when covering these pieces of legislation would be impossible. Bantimaroudis and Ban (2001) counted the number of times the newspapers The
New York Times and The Manchester Guardian printed the words “warlord” and “factions” during their coverage of President Siad Barre’s and formal parliament’s downfall during the Somalian Civil War in 1991. However, it is almost inevitable for researchers to apply their cultural experience when they to induce the meaning of texts (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). In the case of this study, a simple count of specific key phrases would not produce any sort of potential latent meaning or ideology that is presented in the texts. Another important component of framing analysis involves determining which voices are not presented. This would be difficult to through quantitative research means.

Entman (1993) lays the theoretical and methodological backbone for what the researcher should look for during a framing analysis, such as this one. From a framing perspective, dominant meaning consists of the problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed, and accepted by the most people. To identify a meaning as dominant or preferred is to suggest a particular framing of the situation that is most heavily supported by the text and is congruent with most common audience schemata (p.56).

This study followed Entman’s guidelines, who cautions against tallying up all messages judged as positive or negative and drawing conclusions about the dominant meanings, since this can lead to data that misrepresents the media messages most individuals in the audience receive. It is necessary to assess the salience of elements in the text (p.57).
To cite an example outside of the scope of this research, consider a CBS news story dated October 15, 2012. The journalist framed the issue of marijuana legalization through the economic impact it would have on the state of Colorado. The opening shot is of a married couple that owns a restaurant and used to run a marijuana dispensary. The narrator of the news story also tells viewers about the 500 marijuana dispensaries that put eleven million dollars in Colorado’s coffers. The economic impact is given more salience than the reasons why detractors oppose marijuana’s legalization—negative health effects. The issue of marijuana is framed as an economic one. This particular news story frames marijuana users two ways. In this case the married couple are framed as individuals who possess the entrepreneurial spirit and as people who would rather relax at the end of the day with a marijuana cigarette than with a beer. Opponents of Amendment 64 featured in the video frame marijuana users as those who submit themselves to brain damage and short attention spans. They are referred to by the sheriff as people who don’t represent the state of Colorado.
Overview

Thirty television station news stories from local Colorado stations mentioned marijuana during the time period sampled. These stations mostly focused on the amendment’s anticipated effects and primarily used five frames to tell the story of what the legislation means for Colorado voters and residents. Twenty-eight stories from stations in Oregon were analyzed. In stories broadcast on Oregon three frames emerged. At Oregon stations the focus was primarily on the ballot measure’s lack of popularity. This study does not attempt to make a connection or correlation between the frames used when journalists covered these pieces of legislation. It is, however, worthwhile to bear in mind Colorado Amendment 64 passed and Oregon Measure-80 failed. The following frames emerge in Colorado stations’ coverage of Colorado Amendment 64:

1. regulation for marijuana similar to regulations for alcohol
2. controversial legislation
3. impact on Colorado’s communities/image
4. economic issue

Regulation for Marijuana Similar to Regulations for Alcohol

The “regulation for marijuana similar to regulation for alcohol” frame was the most frequently occurring frame during the time period analyzed. It most
closely relates to the marijuana as an “economic issue” frame because the stories brought some saliency to the economic benefits regulating marijuana would have on Colorado. Many of the stories emphasized that Amendment 64 was essentially the counterpart to regulations already in place for alcohol and regulations on marijuana would foster safer consumption. In these stories the reporters highlighted the economic benefits this legislation would allow the government to reap from people in Colorado who spend money on marijuana outweigh the public relations or image problems that would likely come after the legislation passed. These frames also suggest the remedy that regulation will make marijuana consumption safer and benefit the public. This judgment defines the problem that marijuana consumption is unsafe if left unregulated.

KUSA aired a story on October 21 that outlined the specific ways that Amendment 64 would regulate marijuana; similar to the ways that alcohol is regulated. For example, Colorado residents over the age of 21 would be able to legally possess up to an ounce and grow six marijuana plants for personal use. In this story, the problem outlined is that marijuana prohibition is a failed policy that drains public funds. Amendment 64 was suggested as a remedy because according to the report it will allow police to focus their efforts on “more serious” crimes. It also suggests the remedy of taking the debate on the merits of legalized marijuana to the federal level.

KCNC also framed the story about Amendment 64 by comparing it to regulations on alcohol On October 15. It also defined the problem that the money people spend on marijuana benefits drug cartels. The suggested remedy is that the money could go to the government and in turn back to the people if
marijuana was regulated through Amendment 64. This story was more specific than any of the other stories analyzed. Viewers were informed that Amendment 64 directs the Colorado state legislature to enact an excise tax on marijuana so lawmakers would have to vote for a tax increase and that tax increase would have to be approved by the voters.

KRDO described Amendment 64 on November 4 as legislation that would “change the state’s constitution to regulate marijuana like alcoholic beverages…Right next to our right to vote and our right to freedom of religion we have the right to get high? I don’t think so.” This is one instance where a news story made a moral judgment about smoking marijuana, basically that smoking shouldn’t be protected by the same document that protects Coloradoans’ freedoms.

**Controversial Legislation**

The time period analyzed began on October 9 and television stations often framed Amendment 64 as controversial throughout their coverage. Stations used phrases such as “creating a stir up,” “the debate is heating up,” and “endorsement war” and often pointed out its opposition to federal law. The words “pot” and “marijuana” were both mentioned in a news story KCNC ran on October 25 and on October 28, KMGH ran on November 2 and KRDO ran on November 4. The word selection is important because of the different connotation of those words. “Pot” has a negative connotation and is often associated with unsavory characters that smoke marijuana. The word marijuana has a less negative connotation; it is often associated with individuals who smoke it for medicinal reasons.
In these and other news stories, Amendment 64 was portrayed as a controversial initiative that went against federal law and made communities more dangerous; other stories center on who either endorses or opposes the amendment. Stories similar to these emphasized the importance of the legislation to viewers but interestingly did not make any moral judgments about individuals who smoke marijuana. In stories similar to these, reporters spoke almost cryptically about the amendment’s benefits.

For example, on October 10 the reporter said, “Amendment 64 is creating quite a stir up around Mesa County. Some believe it will cause more problems for law enforcement, while others think it will do the exact opposite” during the teaser for the news story. Other stories similarly played up the divisive nature of Amendment 64 without addressing the specifics of how the amendment will aid or harm people who live in Colorado.

KJCT reported on November 1 Amendment 64 was “one of the more controversial issues on the ballot” and voters have strong opinions on it. In this story the reporter cited unspecified supporters who say the legislation would bring in revenue for the state and opponents who say it will lead to “social issues,” such as an increase in drug addiction in adolescents. In both instances the report did not address how passing Amendment 64 would contribute to either of these phenomena. The reports ended by stating both sides are very passionate about the amendment. This implies both sides feel strongly and indicates the controversial nature of this amendment. This story shows both sides believe their stance on Amendment 64 serves the public good. This disagreement is the root of the controversy.
KJCT reported on October 18 that the (then) recent debates over the merits of legalization of marijuana wouldn’t be the last and that “marijuana is dividing some of our congressional opponents.” The report mentioned politicians who publically supported de-criminalization of marijuana and those who didn’t agreed on many other political issues. The report noted the issue of marijuana legalization was bringing Colorado into the national spotlight and explained what would become legal if the legislation was passed.

KCNC referred to Amendment 64 as possibly the most controversial measure on Colorado’s ballot on October 15. The reporter, who was live with the mayor of Denver, Colorado Michael Hancock, outlined the arguments supporters and detractors of Amendment 64 commonly made (pro-good for the economy; con- it will hurt Colorado tourism). The report also noted the dichotomy in who supported and opposed Amendment 64. The amendment received support from the Commercial Workers Union, while the mayor publically opposed it. Voters were essentially asked to determine if they agreed with one of the largest unions in the state or their government representative.

**Impact on Colorado’s Public Health/Image**

In many stories that were broadcast on Colorado television stations the emphasis was put on the impact Amendment 64 would have on the communities in Colorado. In other words, these stories focused on whether the people would be better off health-wise if Amendment 64 passed. Additionally, two stories focused on the image Colorado would have nationally if Amendment 64 passed. These two stories can be included in this frame because they go off of the
assumption that government should protect its citizens and therefore allowing legislation that could potentially harm the citizenship should be scrutinized. Interestingly, the moral judgments made weren’t that consuming marijuana was wrong per se, but rather it could serve as a so-called gateway drug. Colorado stations focused not only on the public health and safety issues Amendment 64 presents but also on the perception others would (supposedly) have of the state.

Similarly, a story broadcast on KWGN on October 17 implicitly suggested voters oppose Amendment 64. However, in this story the problem wasn’t the negative perception of Colorado Amendment 64 would lead to; it was the high-risk marijuana dispensaries would bring to Colorado’s communities. Although the story did not say what specifically would likely happen if Amendment 64 was passed, it did define individuals who “graduated” from marijuana to other drugs that led to an early and untimely death as the problem. The story also included a moral judgment about Amendment 64 when it cited a group of religious leaders who publically oppose it.

KREX ran a story on October 10 that presented both sides of the debate over the merits of Amendment 64 based on the impact it would have on the community. The story operated on the assumption that any benefit to the community that would come about as either a direct or indirect result of Amendment 64 wouldn’t outweigh the harm it would cause to Colorado residents. However, it also refers to Amendment 64 as a potential solution to the “public policy nightmare” that Colorado had at the time; essentially the lesser of two evils. The story cited the Mesa County (western Colorado, along Highway 70) sheriff who defined individuals who would abuse legal marijuana the potential
problem. This story also implied many individuals who consume marijuana act dishonestly when it referenced medical marijuana cardholders who use their card as a license to get high.

Another news story that framed the debate over marijuana legalization and regulation was broadcast on October 15 on KCNC. This story emphasized the negative effect this legislation would likely have on tourism to Colorado—although, again it did not mention how this would happen specifically—and defined that as the problem Amendment 64 presents. The story, which also focused on the controversial nature of the amendment, interviewed the mayor of Denver who pointed out that even if (when) Amendment 64 passes it will still go against the federal legislation. This conflict puts Colorado in a negative light and subjects the state and businesses in it to litigation according the report. The mayor also said he would not be okay with his children smoking because it could lead to them trying more dangerous drugs.

The November 4 story KRDO ran serves as an example of a news organization presenting multiple frames for one particular story. Although it does compare marijuana regulations to alcohol regulations, it primarily frames Amendment 64 as a detriment to the communities in Colorado and something that will negatively affect the image of the state. The news story presents a particularly gripping image of Colorado as a “Mecca for anyone who wants to smoke or sell or be involved in the pot industry” if Amendment 64 passes and that this is not the “right image.” The story diagnoses Colorado’s robust medical cannabis industry as the “cause” of Amendment 64. Although the story does not do so explicitly, the suggested remedy would be for voters to oppose Amendment
64 to keep Colorado’s image from deteriorating. Similarly, KDVR ran a story on November 6 that framed Colorado negatively as the “marijuana capitol,” essentially the state where anyone with an interest in growing or consuming marijuana would go.

**Economic Issue**

Framing the issue of marijuana regulation as an economic issue goes hand and hand with framing it as regulation similar to alcohol. Not every story that framed the debate in terms of the financial benefits that Colorado would receive compared those regulations to alcohol regulations. However, both of these frames suggested similar remedies: instead of letting the money that consumers spend on marijuana go exclusively to people who grow marijuana (sometimes said to be cartels), the state should tax marijuana and reap the financial reward. These stories were unlikely to make moral judgments about the merits of marijuana legalization.

In some of these stories references were made to the support Amendment 64 received from construction and trade unions. KREX broadcast a story on October 16 that defined the problem that there were not enough “above ground” jobs in Colorado. Although the story did not diagnose the cause for this it did suggest Amendment 64 as a potential remedy to this problem. The story also highlighted the union’s opinion that the war on drugs has been a “costly failure” and regulation would help do away with a failed policy.

Not all stories suggested it was a foregone conclusion that Amendment 64 would have a positive impact on the economy. KCNC ran a story on October 15
that framed the debate through the lens of the economy but defined Amendment 64 as the problem because workers are more likely to show up to work high if marijuana becomes legal. However earlier in the story it was suggested that Amendment 64 was actually the remedy to a sluggish economy. Similar to the report on October 16, it suggested the Colorado economy benefits when the money spent on marijuana is taxed and kept in Colorado.

Overview of Oregon Stations

Twenty-eight television news stories from stations in Oregon were analyzed. The most prominent frames were (in order):

1. horse race or electoral prospects
2. impact on Oregon’s public health and safety
3. economic issue

Horserace or electoral prospects

Often television news stations in Oregon framed the issue through the electoral prospects lens. That is to say, stories that used these frames were more likely to focus on why the measure was unlikely to pass than to debate the measure’s merits.

This type of framing first appeared on October 12 when KOBI ran stories during the 5 and 6 o’clock news that looked at the debate on Measure 80 as purely a political issue. The reporter also outlined a lack of funding for the measure as the cause he felt the Measure 80 would not pass. Additionally the
reporter said the measure wasn’t likely to pass because it was poorly written, diagnosing another cause. While the reporter didn’t suggest making any remedies, the reporter did make a moral judgment—“I don’t see how they can keep a prohibition on a plant.”

KMVU ran a story on October 12 that outlined the problems with Measure-80. Specifically, that Measure-80 was not expected to pass because it was too vaguely written and not financially supported as much as similar legislation in other states according to the report. Oregon’s Chief petitioner suggested the remedy that any problems with the law, such as a lack of specific language, could be fixed later. Missing from the report were any explanations for why Measure-80 was written vaguely or any moral judgments about the legislation.

KPTV ran a brief story on October 12 framing the debate over marijuana legalization around the billboards protesting Measure-80 that said marijuana was good for nothing. Protestors called the billboards misleading and demanded that they be taken down. Additionally, the story suggests the tax and regulation model of Measure-80 as a remedy to the prohibition model without making any moral judgments.

KATU ran a story on November 5 that attempted to predict the upcoming election. It analyzed the chances Measure 80 had of passing and the strategies the measure’s proponents and opponents used. It diagnosed the lack of “big money” on Measure 80’s side as the cause the measure was not expected to pass.

KPTV framed the Measure-80 in the “who’s winning” or horse race frame on October 13. The story refers to polls that showed “at least 50% support” for the
measure. The story also referenced long time advocates of marijuana reform who were “giddy” about the possibility of legalized marijuana in Oregon. The report also referenced nine former heads of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration who “urged” the attorney general to oppose the legalization. The word “urged” is significant because it implies that the players in Amendment-80 believe the vote is urgent.

KATU ran a story on October 19 that framed the “controversial” issue similarly; the reporter made reference to exclusive new poll numbers that showed opponents of legalizing marijuana were leading by 7% and that 21% of voters were still undecided on the initiative. This poll was also mentioned briefly a week later during the five o’clock. The story did explain what the measure would do, “essentially the state would be getting into the marijuana business...revenue would be used to operate the new commission and finance state programs.” This suggested Measure 80 as a remedy for new streams of money.

KATU also briefly presented the debate over Oregon Measure-80 through a “who’s winning frame” on November 1. According to the poll 49 percent of people said they would vote no.

**Impact on Oregon’s Public Health and Safety**

It is important to note that many of the news stories from stations in Oregon, especially ones that employ the public health frame, describe Measure-80 as legislation that would “legalize” marijuana, rather than “regulate” marijuana. This implies marijuana is an illegal drug that authorities could potentially make available for adult consumption. The wording suggests Measure
80 would have a negative impact on Oregon’s public health and safety because the legislation would allow public consumption of a previously illegal substance. To “regulate” marijuana implies monitoring the consumption of a potentially dangerous and previously illegal substance.

KRCW ran a story on October 11 that framed the debate over Oregon Measure 80 through the public health issue lens. It centered on anti-Measure 80 billboards that read “Marijuana. What’s good about it? Nothing.” The billboard was said to have upset people who use medical marijuana. The moral judgment in the story is smoking marijuana can be acceptable, that it is not inherently an immoral act. This news story does not go into the merits of medicinal marijuana or recreational marijuana legalization but does implicitly define the misunderstanding about the potential benefits of marijuana as the problem.

KTVZ broadcast another story on October 18 that relied on the marijuana as a public health issue during the 6 o’clock news. It made references to parents who brought their families to a statewide marijuana summit. It also mentioned law enforcement officials who, at that summit said legalizing marijuana poses a danger to communities. The officials didn’t make any explicit moral judgments about marijuana in the story; although they did diagnose the potential increase of people driving high and an increased crime rate as the potential cause of unsafe communities in Oregon. KTVZ ran a similar story about the marijuana summit the next day. Although it was much briefer than the story the day before, it presented the debate through a similar public health frame. The measure, if passed, would still contradict federal law and likely lead to an increase in adolescent consumption.
KTVL framed the debate over Measure-80 on October 29 by bringing salience to the impact the legislation would likely have on the communities in Oregon. The sheriff of Umatila County (near the border of Washington) said he opposed the measure because he believes it would lead to more crime, such as criminal trespassing, robbery and burglary. The story seemed to define marijuana, legal or otherwise, as a problem for the safety of communities in Oregon. The story presented the potential increase in crime as a result of Measure 80 as such a real threat that the economic benefit it would offer is not enough to justify voting yes on the measure. It also makes the assumption that people who will grow legalized marijuana (post-Measure-80) would not report their earning and not actually give money back via taxes. The suggested remedy is for voters to vote against legislation that would legalize marijuana on a state level but still contradict federal authority, which the story defined as the major problem with the legislation.

Conversely, KPDX presented the debate over Measure 80 through the public health and safety frame on October 29. The reporter in this story presented the argument that the legislation would positively impact the residents of Oregon. Specifically, the story suggests legalized marijuana as the remedy war veterans who have post-traumatic stress disorder. It also makes the moral judgment that smoking doesn’t morally bankrupt an individual or at least isn’t as bad as the sheriff of Umatila County believes smoking is for communities.
Economic Issue

A major frame in the coverage Oregon television stations provided was concern for how the economy would be affected if the legislation passed. The stories broadcast in Oregon framed Measure-80 as a benefit to the Oregon economy.

KOIN broadcast a story on October 10 that defined the current legislation on marijuana in Oregon as the problem. Without assigning any moral judgments about individuals who choose to consume marijuana, the story suggested voters approve Oregon Measure 80. If Measure-80 was approved it would bring in money for education, health care and substance abuse prevention measures according to the two United States attorneys who were interviewed in the story.

KTVL broadcast a news story on October 14 that presented the debate in an economic frame. The story highlighted a married couple that once ran a marijuana dispensary and marketed foods with marijuana in them. The story suggested a remedy of legalized recreational marijuana to boost the economy with similar so-called mom and pop shops that sell marijuana and/or marijuana products. The implied marijuana moral judgment is that responsible marijuana consumption is acceptable.

KTVL broadcast a story on October 29 that brought saliency to the expected impact Measure-80 would have on the safety of communities in Oregon and also the economic impact of Measure-80, the suggested remedy. This story provides an example of a news story using multiple frames. When framing the story through the economic frame, the story highlights the expected $140 million of tax revenue the bill would create.
KPTV broadcast a story on November 2, that briefly covered the upcoming Measure-80 vote through the economic frame. It referred to the war on marijuana as a “complete failure” that costs taxpayers nearly $60 million dollars a year. This defines the problem and suggests a yes for on Measure 80 as the solution.
Overview

Coverage of Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80 was not as robust on CNN as it was on the television stations in Colorado and Oregon previously mentioned. There were a limited number of texts, when compared to coverage in Colorado and Oregon. This study analyzed fifteen news stories on CNN, most of these stories were about Colorado Amendment 64. There were few stories about Oregon Measure 80. This study found four frames were used prominently when discussing “pro-pot” legislation in Oregon and Colorado:

1. economic
2. outsider’s perception
3. libertarian
4. horse race or electoral prospects

Economic

At 10:50 on September 26 CNN broadcast a discussion on the merits of marijuana legalization and regulation. The story defined the problem when it made reference to the federal government spending about $10 billion on law enforcement related to marijuana arrests. It made the moral judgment that individuals who are arrested for smoking/possessing marijuana aren’t as bad for society as violent criminals. The story suggested legislation similar to Amendment 64 and Measure 80 as remedies to high state expenditures.
Specifically, it would keep states from having to spend money on individuals who were prosecuted for marijuana possession. Additionally, it would bring in approximately $6 billion in tax dollars, according to the story.

CNN framed the debate similarly on October 1, through an economic frame. The story suggests Amendment 64 in Colorado as the remedy to add $40 million dollars to the public education budget. Denver’s superintendent called the proposed plan a “cruel joke,” making the moral judgment that it would be better for Colorado to not have money gained from marijuana taxed by the state government and maintain a high moral standard. It is significant to note in the story that the slang term “weed,” which carries a more negative connotation than marijuana, is used in place of marijuana. This story was rebroadcast at 10:40 later that night.

The next day (Oct. 2) at 9:49 CNN framed the debate over legalized marijuana through the economic frame again; drawing comparisons to the way laws tax and regulate alcohol. In this story the most “significant” issue is defined as the financial trouble Colorado’s public schools were/are in and the additional $40 million Amendment 64 would bring in according to the estimates is the suggested remedy.

CNN framed the issue on October 26 by bringing salience to the economic benefit Colorado would receive. This particular story focused on Colorado freeing up police resources for so-called more serious crimes. It referenced a study that showed 108,000 people in Colorado were arrested for marijuana possession and suggested Amendment 64 as a remedy. The problem, as defined by the story, is that police resources are unnecessarily tied to prosecuting people who are found
possessing marijuana. The underlying moral judgment is that possessing and/or consuming marijuana, as long as the money spent on marijuana can be taxed, isn’t as big of a detriment to a productive society as committing violent crimes.

CNN broadcast a story on November 5 that brought salience to the economic benefits Colorado Amendment 64 was expected to bring to the state, referring to the legislation as the “most ambitious” marijuana legislation to date. Like the other story that employed the economic frame, the story broadcast on November 5 suggested Amendment 64 as the remedy to Colorado school districts in need of more money. According to the political experts brought in for the story, Colorado schools would receive $40 million and would bolster state coffers by helping Colorado realize the tax benefits. The story defined unregulated marijuana as the problem. Taking it off “the streets” would also help keep Colorado’s communities safer according to the experts featured in the story.

**Outsider’s Perception**

Because CNN obviously broadcasts outside of the two states this study analyzed, its focus was often on “what does this mean for someone who doesn’t live in Oregon or Colorado?” Sometimes this was a politician’s opinion and other times it was more of a consensus opinion of the so-called common person.

On September 8 CNN broadcast a brief story that framed the debate in Colorado through vice-presidential hopeful Paul Ryan’s, an outsider’s, perception. Specifically he felt that legalizing and regulating marijuana should be handled on the state level. Additionally he said legalizing marijuana was not a high priority for his campaign.
CNN framed the debate over Amendment 64 on October 26 by highlighting the outsider’s perception. The story diagnosed marijuana as the cause for a negative outsider’s view of the state. According to the guest on CNN, passing Amendment 64 would bolster Colorado’s image as a so-called “party and get high state.” This story also referred to Colorado as a potential “Mecca” for potheads. This terminology makes the moral judgment that marijuana smokers are a detriment to society and that legislation that supports these people should not be passed. It defines marijuana smokers as the problem.

For some outsiders the most important impact of Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80 was on the presidential election. More young voters, who the story implied wanted to vote “yes” on the “pro-pot” legislation, were expected to show up at the polls and influence the presidential election. “The conventional wisdom is that this would draw in younger, more progressive voters and (marijuana) is very popular in (Colorado).” The story makes a moral judgment that this legislation is radical, “We’re not talking about marijuana for medicinal uses. We’re talking about legalizing marijuana in Colorado, Washington and Oregon.”

**Libertarian**

Politically speaking libertarianism is a set a political beliefs that emphasize individual liberty, personal freedom and, in turn, legislation that supports these ideals; although the libertarian mindset often supports abolishing legislation as a means to these ends (Quinton, 1993). As it relates to CNN’s coverage of the “pro-pot” legislation, the libertarian frame suggests that voters support Amendment
64 or similar legislation because doing so would foster individual freedom and liberty.

For example, on September 26 during an Out Front segment, CNN presented the issue through the libertarian frame. The discussion also used the economic frame, suggesting the initiatives as possible remedies to reducing state expenditures by no longer prosecuting individuals that possess marijuana. The main frame was that legalized marijuana would bring residents of Colorado and Washington more personal liberty. The story cited statistics that indicates a statistically disproportionate number of minorities are arrested for marijuana possession. This story makes a moral judgment on the legislation that prohibits marijuana consumption but not on the individuals who smoke. Acknowledging the libertarian frame, the host of the segment makes a joke at the end, “I thought for a second that I was talking to Ron Paul,” a noted libertarian politician.

CNN featured libertarian candidate Gary Johnson on November 3 to join Afternoon Programming to discuss the upcoming elections. As one would presume from a libertarian candidate such as Johnson, he defined a limit on the personal freedom to choose to smoke/consume marijuana as the problem. Speaking in the abstract, he suggested that legalized marijuana would help remedy a lack of personal freedom and liberty.

**Horse race**

CNN used a horse race frame secondarily on October 1 when discussing Colorado Amendment 64 with John Avlon. After discussing that taxing legalized marijuana would boost the state’s school budget by $40 million, the story
referenced a poll that showed 51% support and 40% opposition. This same poll was mentioned the next day on another story about Amendment 64 the next day.
Overview

Although the borders of Hallin’s (1980) spheres are ill defined, the issue of legalized marijuana moved into the sphere of legitimate controversy in most media outlets in Colorado and Oregon during the three months before November 6, 2012 and probably before then. In this sphere, particularly as one moves away from the center “the news deals with issues on which the consensus is weaker, the principle of balance is increasingly emphasized” (p.117-118). The lines between these spheres may not be definitive, but it seemed apparent throughout the coverage that all the stations in the study placed the debate somewhere in the sphere of legitimate controversy. This finding should not come with any great surprise, considering the television stations sampled in this study were covering proposed legislation. The purpose of this chapter will explore how the frames television stations used helped construct a legitimate controversy.

Colorado Stations

KCNC in Denver broadcast a “story of two moms who come at this debate from very different places” on October 25. The story went on to explain the story of the two mothers. One mother said she saw her son become addicted to marijuana and said she didn’t want to see other parents go through what she had to go through. The other mother supported Amendment 64 because she said her
son was sexually assaulted by a “street dealer” and postulated buying marijuana over the counter would make her community safer. This story used the “controversial legislation frame” to emphasize the principle of objectivity.

Although the story did not use any official sources to support or refute the claims made about Amendment 64’s potential impact on the demand for marijuana, it did provide both sides with an opportunity to express their viewpoints on a controversial piece of legislation they both felt strongly about. The story relied on the dichotomy of opinions of two mothers who were impacted by their respective son’s marijuana use to emphasize the principle of balance. In so doing, the story’s frame helped create relative legitimacy around the issue of Amendment 64.

KCNC also emphasized the principle of balance during a story that ran on October 15. One way this story differed from the story broadcast on October 25 is that it relied on official sources. However, an effort was still made to present opponents and proponents of Amendment 64 with an opportunity to express their stance through the “controversial legislation frame.” The Commercial Workers Union announced their support for the amendment through a spokesman and cited the expected increase in the number of jobs as the reason for their support. Conversely, the mayor of Denver took an official stance against Amendment 64 because he felt legalized marijuana consumption would “lead to more harmful habits” and that it would have a negative impact on Colorado tourism. The story further constructed a legitimate controversy when the reporter recited an official statement (Hallin, p. 117) from the joint policy alliance that supported Amendment 64. This, along with the emphasis on balance provides examples of television stations in Colorado helping construct relative legitimacy.
of Amendment 64 as a policy issue. KCNC was not the only station to help construct this relative legitimacy but these two stories provide compelling examples.

**Oregon Stations**

Similar construction of relative legitimacy could also be found on television stations in Oregon, such as KTVL in Medford-Klamath Falls. A news story broadcast on November 3 emphasized the principle of balance when discussing Oregon Measure-80. Umatilla County Sheriff John Tromboe, an official source, said he opposed the measure because he believed the measure would lead to an increase in crime. Additionally he said he believed marijuana growers will not actually report their income and therefore the tax benefits would not be realized. The story also used Paul Stanford, the individual who drafted the measure and founded the Hemp & Cannabis Foundation, as a source. He said the tax revenue from marijuana sales would assist law enforcement efforts and put Oregon on the cutting edge of using hemp as a source of energy. This stance on Oregon Measure-80 conflicts with Officer Tromboe’s and provides another example of a news story emphasizing balance as the story helps construct a legitimate controversy.

The frames used during a KTVZ broadcast on October 18 also helped construct the relative legitimacy of the debate over Oregon Measure 80. In fact, during the anchor’s introduction to the news reporter on the scene the anchor said the story had “both arguments.” This demonstrates the emphasis the story put on the ideals of “objectivity” and balance. In the story, saliency was given to
sheriff’s deputies and other law enforcement officials who spoke about Measure 80 through the “impact on Oregon’s public health and safety” frame. These sources, opponents of Measure 80 said the impact of the measure would be negative: the measure would lead to an increase in marijuana addiction. However, the story did allow for proponents of Measure 80 to voice their support through the same frame. These supporters said they believe marijuana has legitimate health benefits. The story helps construct the legitimate controversy by “balancing” the story to include sources voicing different opinions on the legislation.

**Cable News Network**

CNN also helped construct the relative legitimacy of the debates about the merits of Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure-80. Its coverage was particularly reliant on official sources compared to local stations in Colorado and Oregon. CNN broadcast a segment on October 26 that used a spokesperson from No On 64 and a member co-owner of the Denver Medical Marijuana Center, Kayvon Khalatbari. The representative from No On 64, Happy Haynes used the “impact on Colorado’s communities and image” frame when asked to explain No On 64’s position. Haynes, who serves on the Denver Board of Education, said that she wouldn’t want Colorado’s image to become that of a party state. Khalatbari used the “economic issue” frame to state his opinion; referencing $60 million Colorado’s government could gain by taxing recreational cannabis use and industrialized hemp. The use of these two frames helps construct the relative legitimacy around the debate over Amendment 64 because they demonstrate an
emphasis on balance. The story implicitly asked voters if they agreed with Khalatbari’s postulation: the economic benefits of Amendment 64 are more important than the negative impact passing Amendment 64 could potential have on Colorado’s image. When CNN presented this debate using journalistic values Hallin (p.116) would call “objectivity and balance”—one side was not favored over the other, for example. This also helped construct a legitimate controversy around Amendment 64.

The “economic frame” used by CNN during a broadcast on September 26 also indicates how CNN’s stories helped to construct relative legitimacy around the issue of legislation that supported marijuana legalization. The story emphasizes balance and “objectivity” by airing viewpoints from sources that believe the legislation will help the state and those who believe it will not. Specifically, the advocate of marijuana legalization said the legislation would free up law enforcement resources and serve as a means to spend less on prison. The opponent said that the increased level of addiction treatment would waste the taxpayers’ dollars. These differing opinions helped CNN construct the relative legitimacy of the argument over the merits of marijuana legalization.

**Conclusion**

Legislative debates, such as the ones over Oregon Measure 80 and Colorado Amendment 64 that established actors in the political process recognize are located in the sphere of legitimate controversy (Hallin, 1980). These stories emphasized the principles of balance and “objectivity,” both of which are hallmarks of the sphere of legitimate controversy. This chapter has demonstrated
how television stations in Colorado, television stations in Oregon and CNN helped construct the relative legitimacy of the debate over legalized and regulated marijuana.
CHAPTER EIGHT
Discussion

Summary of Frames

The primary research question that guided this study was: What frames were present in television coverage of the 2012 debate over legalized and regulated marijuana on television stations in Colorado and Oregon in addition to CNN? In total, 60 stories from television stations in Colorado and Oregon in addition to fifteen stories from CNN were analyzed. Table 1 summarizes the most prominent frames used by the three sources of television news. The first and last frames listed in each column represent the most and least prominent, respectively. Interestingly, each source of television news used frames that were uniquely theirs. Stations in Colorado were the only ones that framed Colorado Amendment 64 through the “regulations similar to ones on alcohol frame.” Oregon stations used the “political issue” frame to cover the debate. CNN was the only channel to employ the “outsider’s perspective” and “libertarian” frames when discussing the debate on marijuana.

Table 1. Summary of Frame

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<th>Colorado stations</th>
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<td>regulations on marijuana similar to ones on alcohol</td>
<td>public health and safety issue</td>
<td>economic issue</td>
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<td>controversial legislation</td>
<td>political issue</td>
<td>outsider’s perspective</td>
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<td>impact on Colorado’s communities/image</td>
<td>horserace coverage</td>
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It is clear that the economic issue was the most prominent across all three sources of television news; it was used in more stories than any of the other frames. Although there were a smaller number of texts to analyze of CNN, a higher percentage of the stories that appeared on CNN used an economic frame. Stations in Colorado and Oregon often described how much of an economic boon Colorado Amendment 64 or Oregon Measure 80 would be for their respective states.

While the focus for local news stations was on the impact the legislation would have on the community the stations are a part of, CNN had no such tie to the community. CNN also had the resources to have access to national politicians and other sources outside of the states these elections directly impacted. Additionally, CNN’s journalists likely wanted to demonstrate the legislation proposed in Colorado and Oregon would indirectly impact individuals who live outside of those states.

Within this frame, the economic benefit (real or perceived) was the main character of concern. This economic frame was the frame that stations in Colorado, stations in Oregon and CNN all used during their coverage of “pro-pot” legislation. Stories that emphasized the economic boost Colorado would receive often used phrases such as “realize the tax benefits” and “we know where the money is going.” They emphasized that the money spent on marijuana would return to Colorado and not Mexican drug cartels. They also emphasized creating
“legitimate” or “above ground” jobs. These same stories called the previous legislation that prohibited selling marijuana costly failures and mistakes. These stories were the least likely to make negative moral judgments about marijuana use. Put another way, people are going to want to get high, so you might as well tax them similarly to taxing people who want to drink alcohol.

**Regulation for Marijuana Similar to Regulations for Alcohol**

While the “marijuana regulation similar to alcohol regulation frame” was the frame that occurred the most in Colorado, television news reporters often did not expand on *how* Amendment 64 would regulate marijuana. This makes sense in a media such as television where brevity is valued. It is much quicker for a reporter to say Amendment 64 regulates marijuana like alcohol than to go into the specifics *how* it does so. Still, the government regulates plenty of products. It is interesting that the comparison was always made to alcohol and not caffeinated soda, for example. There is a history of proposed regulation on soda. It was going to be regulated by New York City’s government before the New York Supreme Court overruled the Board of Health’s decision to limit the size of. Stories often explicitly compared Amendment 64 to alcohol regulations but sometimes used phrases such as “for adults over 21.” This terminology is different from stations in Oregon that used the term “young people” to refer those who would still be prohibited under the law from smoking marijuana. This is noteworthy because the reference to young people is vague. Using the phrase “for adults over 21” implies similarities to consuming alcoholic beverages and makes it clear that the legislation does not legalize marijuana for anyone. The comparisons seem to
foster the argument marijuana isn’t particularly worse for an individual or society than alcohol.

**Impact on Colorado’s Communities and Image**

This frame used by stations in Colorado is most similar to the public health frame used by Oregon stations. Both frames emphasized that citizens in their respective states would experience an impact on their wellbeing, often negative, if the “pro-pot” legislation passed. The difference in the case of Colorado was that people were also concerned about the image passing Amendment 64 would give Coloradoans. Stories used phrases that demonstrated Colorado didn’t want to become known as “get high state” or “party state.” A particularly creative image was that Colorado would become a Mecca for potheads. Other stories emphasized the potential and expected increase in crime, lowered productivity in the workplace and an influx of highway accidents as a result of individuals using marijuana irresponsibly. Typically, these stories relied on law enforcement officials for their sources.

**Public health and safety**

This frame is most closely related to the “impact on communities” frame that stations in Colorado employed. The key difference between the two is that stations in Oregon emphasized the effects on an individual smoker, i.e. that marijuana becomes addictive. Conversely, stations in Oregon also made note of the benefits of medicinal marijuana for pain relief for war veterans with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. In Colorado an emphasis was put on the potential
dangers to the community the legislation presented. Again, it is important to note
a key difference between coverage in the two different states. In Oregon,
television stations referred to “legalizing” marijuana not “regulating” marijuana.
This matters because “legalizing” has a connotation that suggests abolishing
prohibition laws. “Regulating” has the connotation that doing so will make
marijuana consumption safer because businesses regulated by the government
could sell marijuana instead of by individuals “on the street” who would have no
such regulations.

**Horserace or Electoral Prospects**

The horserace frame serves as an apt metaphor for the type of framing that
some stations in Oregon and CNN used when covering these pieces of legislation.
When covering a literal horserace, the jockeys and horses are not judged based on
their overall skill or speed but rather in comparison to the other jockeys and
horses. Similarly, when reporters used the horserace frame they essentially are
answering the questions “who’s winning and why?” These stories referred to a
lack of “big money” supporting Measure 80 and exclusive polls that showed
support for the measure was low. They were unlikely to make moral judgments
about the measure or suggest voting a certain way was a remedy to a defined
problem. These stories relied on “exclusive polls” conducted by the station as the
sources. This frame emphasized the latest results of the elections over the merits
of the debate over the legislation.
Outsider’s perspective

The central organizing theme behind the outsider’s perspective frame was this issue mattered to individuals who were not directly impacted by the legislation, such as those who do not live in the states Oregon, Colorado or Washington (which also passed legislation similar to Amendment 64 but is outside the scope of this study). One story referenced vice-presidential candidate Paul Ryan’s opinion on the issue. Other stories emphasized the impact a progressive and young voter turnout would likely have on the presidential election. This frame was featured exclusively on CNN, which shouldn’t come as a surprise. This story also referred to maintaining a positive image for the state of Colorado and concern that passing Amendment 64 would cause others to believe it is a party and get high state.

Libertarian

Another frame that was featured only on CNN was the libertarian frame. When reporters used this frame to construct the issue, they emphasized that legislation such Amendment 64 and Measure 80 fostered individual freedom and personal liberty. When the debate over marijuana legalization and regulation is framed this way, the saliency is given to the number of people who will no longer be arrested for a marijuana possession charge. This would increase personal freedom. The few stories that used this frame emphasized the two ideals of individual freedom and personal liberty. Some stories also called attention to statistics that indicated a disproportionally high number of minorities arrested for marijuana possession, calling it an infringement on personal freedom. These
stories used terminology such as “free to make their own decisions.” CNN stories that used this frame relied on political players, such as Gary Johnson, as their sources.

**Controversial legislation**

The central organizing theme of this frame was the proposed legislation, in this case Colorado Amendment 64 was divisive and contentious among voters and stakeholders. Stations in Colorado used the phrases “creating a stir up,” “the debate is heating up,” and “endorsement war” when they employed this frame. Those stations also often pointed out that even if Amendment 64 was passed smoking and possessing marijuana still opposed federal law, which made the legislation more controversial. Some stories emphasized the importance of the legislation to viewers, while others discussed how politicians who agreed on other topics were divided on this issue. One device used to frame Amendment 64 as divisive was the word selection. These stations used the word “pot” in place of “marijuana” or “hemp” nine times. The word selection is noteworthy because of the different connotation these words have. To say individuals smoke pot implies they are sketchy characters, while smoking marijuana can have the connotation of doing so as an alternative to traditional medicine. These stories emphasized the strong difference in opinions that players on both sides of the debate had.
CHAPTER NINE
Conclusion

Coverage of the so-called “pro-pot” legislation on television stations in Colorado and Oregon in addition to nationally on CNN demonstrates several conclusions. These two pieces of legislation were covered differently in different markets. There are certain key differences that cannot be ignored between the way stations in Colorado covered Amendment 64 and the way stations in Oregon covered Measure 80. Stations in Oregon used the horserace frame to explain to viewers why Measure 80 was not expected to pass and how far its supporters were behind opponents of the legislations. Additionally, stations in Colorado used phrases such as ‘regulating’ when describing what Amendment 64 would do, while Oregon stations were prone to using the term ‘legalizing.’ The difference in the connotations of those two words is stark. Colorado stations were also more prone to compare Amendment 64 to regulations on alcohol, a substance commonly used in the United States.

CNN’s reporters were likely to frame the story through an outsider’s perspective to answer why a viewer in Missouri, for example, should care about legislation up for a vote in another state. The main difference was that CNN framed its coverage, on the whole, closer to the sphere of deviance than local stations. However their coverage was still within the sphere of legitimate controversy. This is exemplified by the quote, “This isn’t decriminalizing. This is making use legal for personal purposes and then regulating a private sector market for marijuana. So this is an extremely progressive law and, you know, the jury is out.” At no point in the texts analyzed, did reporters in Colorado or Oregon
seem as surprised as that CNN reporter that marijuana could soon be legalized and regulated.

**Framing theory**

This study relied heavily on Entman’s (1993) elements of frames. According to him, to frame is to: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. Additionally, and also according to Entman (1989), framing involves “selecting some aspect of perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation.” Additional framing theories that this study relies on include Iyengar’s (1987) definition, in which he defines framing effects as the changes in decision outcomes as a result of what element is given the most saliency or featured most prominently in the news story. The definitions of frames provided above helped identify elements of news stories that brought saliency to a particular way of interpretation. However, in practice many of the news stories sampled had elements of secondary frames. A news story might give saliency to an economic frame but also reference the latest poll numbers, for example. When analyzing frames, future qualitative researchers should be mindful during the coding process in order to accurately select primary frame. This study should be of particular interest to future researchers because of the connection made between Hallin’s spheres of influence and framing theory. This study has used framing theory to address Hallin’s spheres by demonstrating the
way frames used by journalists helped construct relative legitimacy in the debate over legalized and regulated marijuana.

**Further Research**

Using framing analysis, this study was able to identify specific frames in the television coverage of Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80. In doing so it was able to examine the differences in coverage between stations in a state where the legislation passed (Colorado) and where it did not (Oregon). The study examined the significant frames employed by three important sources of television news about marijuana legislation. As with many topics in media, further analysis of the coverage of these and similar pieces of legislation are needed. Similar pieces of legislation will likely be put to a vote in many states in the future. An understanding of the relationship between media, not limited to television, is of utility.

A quantitative analysis of the coverage of legislation similar to Amendment 64 and Measure 80 would complement this study. A quantitative study could examine if the frames identified in this study can be seen across a larger sample and what, if any, additional frames appear. One might use interviews with key players in the debate over the merits of marijuana legalization in an effort to compare the coverage of “pro-pot” legislation with the experiences of the people who are directly involved with it. These interviews would allow the researchers to discover how these individuals framed their actions when interacting with media members and if they thought the media members represented them accurately and, more important, fairly.
It would also be useful for researchers to conduct interviews with members of the media who are asked to produce content about legislation similar to Amendment 64. This would gain knowledge about patterns of sourcing, what constitutes as a story as “newsworthy” and what frames media members thought about to understand this type of legislation. Framing should be understood as an exercise in power by journalists, especially when the frames journalists use impact the public understanding of political issues (Reese, 2001, p.3). Future researchers should consider using frame analyses, such as this one, as a means for social analysis in an effort to gain a better understanding of the political world.

**Critical Theory**

Hallin defines three regions that are governed by different journalistic standards, similar to a target on a dartboard. In the innermost target, lies Hallin’s sphere of consensus, which “encompasses those social objects not regarded by the journalists and most of the society as controversial” (Hallin, 1986, p. 116).

In the concentric circle directly outside the sphere of consensus lies the sphere of legitimate controversy where “objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic virtues”(Hallin, 1986, p. 116). Outside of that circle lies the sphere of deviance, which Hallin (1986) defines as “the realm of those political actors and views which journalists reject as unworthy of being heard” (p.116). When an issue lies outside of the spheres of consensus and/or legitimate controversy the message isn’t as believable to viewers as messages that lie within them.
This study should interest researchers who study or use Hallin’s work because it analyzes how salient elements of the story structure create a legitimate controversy over a political debate. In this case, the political debate was Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80. The study found concrete examples of two theoretical concepts (framing theory and spheres of influence) and determined how frames were used in to provide balance in the stories. By doing this, the study provides evidence of a legitimate controversy and demonstrates the connection between framing theory and Hallin’s spheres of influence.

Limitations

In its analysis of frames in coverage of the debate over Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80, this study does not focus on how journalists selected the frames or the impact frames had on the individuals who viewed the news stories. While these questions may be valuable for future researchers, the limited time frame at the disposal of the researcher prevented those questions from being addressed here. The study also does not attempt to analyze how Amendment 64 and Measure-80 were constructed through interviews with official sources, key stakeholders and other individuals who had a significant impact on the debates and the way the debates were framed. The study is also limited because of the subjective nature of a qualitative analysis. The results are specific to the sample studied and should not be considered generalizable. The results do not attempt to answer how the debate over legalized and regulated marijuana was framed in other states, such as California during the same time period.
Another limitation to this study was the nature of the texts studied. Due to a lack of archived footage available, this study was forced to rely on primarily on the text transcripts of what reporters covering the debate over legalized and regulated marijuana said. This obviously differs from what audience members originally saw during the timespan leading up to the November 6, 2012 elections in Colorado and Oregon. Some, but not all, of the news stories were available online through the particular station’s website or sometimes on YouTube.

This study was additionally limited by the time frame sampled. It is important to consider that if another time period was sampled the results would have been different. However, this study yields the most relevant results. The assumption the researcher made is that sooner the time between the election and when the viewer watches a news story, the more likely the viewer is to remember the news story and the frames in the story. If the story sampled texts from three months before the election, it is likely that the horserace frame would be less prevalent.

**Final remarks**

This study is worthwhile because the body of literature and in-depth studies of television coverage of Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure 80 is rather small and studies on how marijuana legalization/regulation debates are covered are particularly sparse. This study is intended to represent both an inspiration to future researchers to explore a similar topic and a contribution, however small, to fill-in this gap. Furthermore, this study contributes to the sum of human knowledge because it addresses an issue journalists will likely cover
with increasing frequency. As marijuana regulation becomes less scrutinized and more normal, key players in the debate and journalists will interact with increasing frequency. There may come a day when individuals are judged not by whether they smoke marijuana but by what strand they prefer. If, and perhaps when, smoking marijuana lies in the innermost of Hallin’s spheres, some of the frames used to construct the relative legitimacy of this debate mentioned in this study will be seen by researchers in the distant future as laughable. Until such a time, it provides current researchers with an interest in journalists’ coverage of marijuana legislation a jumping off point for their studies.

The implications for journalists in the future are clear. They should be mindful of the way in which they construct the frames used in their stories.

Again, it should not be inferred that the coverage of these two ballot measures cause Amendment 64 to pass and/or Measure-80 to fail. However, it is significant to note that stations in Oregon used the term “legalize” while stations in Colorado used “regulate.” The different word choice in different states suggests the possibility of other organizations imposing their frame on the issue. When creating a news story, framing can be as simple as a word choice. Additionally, journalists would be well advised to abandon the horserace frame and other frames that do not present viewers with the information necessary to make ballot measure decisions.

The debate over the merits of legalized marijuana has moved out of basements covered with Phish posters and entered the sphere of legitimate controversy. As more states propose legislation similar Colorado Amendment 64 and Oregon Measure-80, broadcast journalists would be well advised to
acknowledge their own experiences and previous notions of marijuana. While it is impossible to report the news without any bias, failure to acknowledge where these biases come from can contribute to reporting based on conjecture rather than evidence. The impact the frames constructed in journalists stories have the power to mold a viewer’s perception of “reality.” It is difficult to overstate the magnitude of the responsibility that comes with this power.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A:  
Ballot Measures

Colorado Amendment 64
Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado constitution concerning marijuana, and, in connection therewith, providing for the regulation of marijuana; permitting a person twenty-one years of age or older to consume or possess limited amounts of marijuana; providing for the licensing of cultivation facilities, product manufacturing facilities, testing facilities, and retail stores; permitting local governments to regulate or prohibit such facilities; requiring the general assembly to enact an excise tax to be levied upon wholesale sales of marijuana; requiring that the first $40 million in revenue raised annually by such tax be credited to the public school capital construction assistance fund; and requiring the general assembly to enact legislation governing the cultivation, processing, and sale of industrial hemp?

Oregon Measure-80
Allows personal marijuana, hemp cultivation/use without license; commission to regulate commercial marijuana cultivation/sale.

Result of "Yes" Vote: "Yes" vote allows commercial marijuana (cannabis) cultivation/sale to adults through state-licensed stores; allows unlicensed adult personal cultivation/use; prohibits restrictions on hemp (defined).
**Result of "No" Vote:** "No" vote retains existing civil and criminal laws prohibiting cultivation, possession and delivery of marijuana; retains current statutes that permit regulated medical use of marijuana.

**Summary:** Currently, marijuana cultivation, possession and delivery are prohibited; regulated medical marijuana use permitted. Measure replaces state, local marijuana laws except medical marijuana and driving under the influence laws; distinguishes "hemp" from "marijuana;" prohibits regulation of hemp.

Creates commission to license marijuana cultivation by qualified persons and to purchase entire crop. Commission sells marijuana at cost to pharmacies, medical research facilities and to qualified adults for profit through state-licensed stores. Ninety percent of net proceeds goes to state general fund, remainder to drug education, treatment, hemp promotion. Bans sales to, possession by minors.

Bans public consumption except where signs permit, minors barred. Commission regulates use, sets prices, other duties; Attorney General to defend against federal challenges/prosecutions. Provides penalties. Effective January 1, 2013.