

## FAST MOVING FRONTS - 2009

September 2009



**James N. Druckman talks with *ScienceWatch.com* and answers a few questions about this month's Fast Moving Front in the field of Economics & Business.**



**Article: Political preference formation: Competition, deliberation, and the (Ir)relevance of framing effects**

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Journal: AMER POLIT SCI REV, 98 (4): 671-686 NOV 2004

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### SW: Why do you think your paper is highly cited?

The paper explores the robustness of one of the most influential and widely cited dynamics thought to occur in the course of preference formation: framing effects. The major works on framing effects come from Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, who show that people's preferences dramatically shift due to seemingly innocuous changes in elicitation procedures.

For example, people evaluate an employment program differently if told the program results in 95% employment as opposed to 5% unemployment. If these types of effects are pervasive, it brings into question the possibility of coherent preferences, which had been traditionally assumed to exist in the bulk of the social sciences.

Many have come to take framing effects as a given and have moved away from assuming coherent preferences. Yet, I question the robustness of the initial framing effect findings by exploring their existence in realistic political situations. I focus on competition between frames and the opportunity for individuals to talk to one other — two defining features of most democratic politics.

I find that the results of framing effects are generally not robust. Thus, the paper raises questions about a finding which is among the most discussed and cited in the social sciences.

*"I hope future work will more carefully specify the conditions under which framing effects occur."*

### SW: Does it describe a new discovery, methodology, or synthesis of knowledge?

The results suggest that framing effects are conditional, depending on context and individual differences. As such, the findings partially reconcile competing accounts of preference formation.

### SW: Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?

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The paper suggests that, in political settings characterized by inter-personal discussion and elite competition, people possess the ability to form coherent preferences. They are not particularly susceptible to framing effects.

**SW: How did you become involved in this research and were any particular problems encountered along the way?**

Much of my work is on preference formation and communication. The main challenge entailed collecting the large of amount of data needed to achieve this complex experimental design.

**SW: Where do you see your research leading in the future?**

I hope future work will more carefully specify the conditions under which framing effects occur.

**SW: Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?**

The results suggest that practitioners consider the context under which people are asked to form opinions and that the setting often plays a determinative role in whether individuals can form meaningful preferences.

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KEYWORDS: RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY; DECISION-MAKING; PROSPECT-THEORY; CITIZEN COMPETENCE; INFORMATION; PSYCHOLOGY; COGNITION; CONTEXT; JUDGMENTS; RISK.



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